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## **Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and the great game in Arabia, 1896-1946**

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# Abdul Aziz Al-Saud and the Great Game in Arabia, 1896-1946

by

Hassan S. Abedin

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the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the diplomacy of Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia in his struggle for political legitimacy, financial stability and national security during the period 1896-1946. This study combines analytical and historical approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of three broad issues. First, the extent to which 'Wahhabism' formed the *raison d'être* for the creation of the modern Saudi state. How could a ruler claiming legitimacy through religion then turn to 'non-believers' for support against the Muslim Ottoman Porte? Among the most significant points discussed is the role of Mubarak al-Sabah, ruler of Kuwait in the shaping of Abdul Aziz's political philosophy and support for early Saudi forays in Arabia. This topic, dealt in detail in this work, is often understudied in the contemporary literature.

Second, Abdul Aziz's autonomy or lack thereof in his expansionist policy and the role of tribal politics, Ottoman intrigue, and the establishment of Britain as the major supporter of the Al-Saud. Previous scholarship has often underestimated how early on treaty relations were initiated with the Porte. Third, the factors that led to American involvement in Saudi Arabia and the interplay of corporate, government and Saudi officials which, in part, contributed to Anglo-American tensions during the Second World War period. Also examined are the strategies employed by Washington and London to maintain what they perceived as, control over Abdul Aziz and the gradual emergence of the United States as guarantor of Saudi security and stability. How did the ruler of a distant Arabian country, which took no part in the war effort, manage to gain special extension of Lend Lease Aid by the President of the United States when all other nations, including Britain were cut off in 1945.

This work contrasts some of the existing scholarship on the history of the Middle East which emphasises the role of Western colonial powers in shaping the political landscape of the region, often underestimating the role of local actors.

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There are several private individuals and officials in Saudi Arabia and the United States who are deserving of thanks. While respecting their requests for confidentiality, I would nevertheless like to express my appreciation for their time, critical comments and feedback on a number of issues raised in this thesis. In particular I would like to mention Ambassador Hermann Eilts whose company and conversation I enjoyed immensely. I am grateful to him for sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of Saudi Arabia and insight into American-Saudi relations.

I would like to thank Ms. M. Ebtehaj, Librarian at the Middle East Centre, Oxford and Mrs. L.E. Williamson at the Rhodes House Library, Oxford for their unfailing courtesy and professional help in procuring research material. The staffs at the King Faisal Foundation Library, Riyadh and the King Abdul Aziz University Library, Jeddah were also extremely helpful. I found it quite ironic to discover in their collections, which were proudly shown off to me, a significant number of materials that were unflattering to the regime.



Thanks are also due to the staffs at the Public Record Office, London, and at the US National Archives in Washington, D.C. for their assistance in my archival research. I am particularly grateful for the assistance provided by Major M.U. Qudsi (US Army) and his family. Their generosity and hospitality of greatly facilitated research visits to institutions in the Washington, D.C. area.

Finally, I owe a tremendous debt to my parents and family. Throughout the years of my research and writing they endured great hardship and inconvenience. My father, on whose wisdom, foresight and friendship I relied, passed away during the course of this doctoral work. My ability to balance family obligations and research commitments was tested on many occasions. I cannot articulate the depth of gratitude to my mother, siblings and my wife for their immeasurable courage, and support in those difficult times. It was their sacrifice, encouragement and confidence in my abilities that was crucial to the completion of this thesis. I dedicate this work to all of them.



# Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia





### Transliteration Note

A modified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration system has been used for this thesis. For practical purposes diacritical marks have been eliminated. Place names with an accepted English spelling and personal names of prominent political leaders, cultural or religious figures are spelled in accordance with English norms. Thus Mecca rather than Makkah, Abdul Aziz rather than Abd al-Aziz, and sheikh rather than shaykh.

The 'al' preceding family names are capitalised to indicate prominent family and tribal groups i.e. Al-Saud and Al-Rashid. In the case of individual names, such as Faisal al-Duwish, the 'al' has not been capitalised.

The name of the founder of modern Saudi Arabia is spelled by the Saudi Ministry of Information as King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud. To avoid excessive verbiage I have used the shortened form Abdul Aziz Al-Saud or as he is commonly referred to in English, Ibn Saud.

## Introduction

*'Modern Arab politics is conditioned by leaders more than by political issues'* <sup>1</sup>

E.A. Speiser

*'The ultimate source of power here, as in the whole course of Arab history, is the personality of the commander'*

Gertrude Bell

### The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia <sup>2</sup>

Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia authorised the deployment <sup>of</sup> American and allied troops into the Kingdom. Although approval was ostensibly given by the leading religious scholars, including the chief of the council of scholars and grand mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, the decision resulted in much controversy within the country and the wider Islamic world. <sup>3</sup>

The repercussions of that decision and the subsequent increase in the American military presence in the region have impacted on the Kingdom tremendously. An increasingly vocal and visible opposition movement has developed inside and outside the country. Attacks on American targets in 1995 and 1996, and more recently the events of September 2001, are indicative of the extent to which they are willing to use violence and murder to achieve their aims.

As a consequence relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States are undergoing tremendous scrutiny and re-examination. In particular questions are being asked about the nature of the Kingdom's Wahhabi ideology, its legitimacy and its future path. These issues all have their roots in the historical past and by examining the precedent

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<sup>1</sup> E.A. Speiser, *The United States and the Near East*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947, p.109.

<sup>2</sup> The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially founded on September 23, 1932. Prior to this the territory of was known as the 'Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies'.

<sup>3</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Government, Society and the Gulf Crises*, London: Routledge, p.178.

established by the late King Abdul Aziz it may be possible to find insight into the determinants of current and future Saudi policy.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia comprises the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula and is home to Islam's holiest cities. Its role as the spiritual centre of the Muslim world is matched, if not exceeded, by its role as the world's largest oil producer. Saudi Arabia contains one quarter of the world's total oil with reserves exceeding 260 billion barrels of oil. The wealth provided by oil has led to rapid economic development and social change and has brought with it tension and deep divisions which have become increasingly evident in the last decade.

Though the modern Kingdom is in its seventh decade, it traces its origins back to an eighteenth century alliance between the religious reformer, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, and the political leader Muhammad Al-Saud in the central Arabian region of Najd.<sup>4</sup> This union provided legitimacy to the house of Al-Saud and fused it to the cause of Abdul Wahhab's revivalist mission which sought to return Arabian society to the practices of the very first Islamic community.<sup>5</sup> Abdul Wahhab's primary concerns were with the beliefs and rituals of the people around him—the pagan practices, superstitions, and ignorance of traditional Islamic learning that was prevalent at the time. Political leadership was left to his strategic partner Muhammad Al-Saud and Abdul Wahhab's followers were

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<sup>4</sup> By 1806 the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance had the holy cities of Mecca and Medina from Ottoman control. In response the Ottoman Porte launched an assault on Arabia which crushed the alliance in the early nineteenth century. A second attempt by the descendants of Muhammad Al-Saud to revive the Saudi-Wahhabi entity later that century was partially successful until it too was defeated by the rival family dynasty of the Al-Rashid. See E. Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' Art. XVIII, January 14, 1880 in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIV, 1880, pp. 274-401. A history of the Wahhabi movement forms part of the *Report on Ibn Saud*, January 21, 1918, India Office Records, The British Library, London (hereafter cited as IOR) L/P&S/18/B270.

<sup>5</sup> Abdul Wahhab followed the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, and his guiding principle was that of *tawhid* (unity) which brought together belief in one creator and obedience to the *Qura'n* and *Sunnah* (the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad). See Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp.257-258, 280, 349. Also R. Bayley Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp. 6-7.



instructed that obedience to the *amir* was a part of faith.<sup>6</sup> After initial successes, Ottoman and Egyptian forces crushed the alliance in the early nineteenth century. Attempts to revive the Saudi-Wahhabi entity later that century were partially successful until defeated by the rival family dynasty of the Al-Rashid.

In the early twentieth century the founder of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, considered himself heir to this Saudi-Wahhabi alliance and established his rule on the principles established by his predecessors. As a result Saudi Arabia's constitution is the Quran and its laws are derived from *shari'ah* (Islamic jurisprudence) making it one of the most conservative regimes in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> However, despite this Abdul Aziz began from an early stage to court the 'infidel' British and helped undermine the authority of the Muslim Ottoman sovereign in the region. In fact, Britain more than any other Muslim power became the source of economic and political stability for Abdul Aziz. This role was subsequently taken over by the United States during the Second World War. Throughout, as shall be seen, Abdul Aziz successfully played the 'great game' in Arabia, negotiating with competing colonial and imperialist powers to achieve his political ends.

### Major Themes

This thesis shall examine Ibn Saud's struggle for political legitimacy, financial stability and national security. It shall focus particularly on his relationship with Britain and the United States and the development of dependency on these foreign powers. Within the scope of this work three broad issues will be addressed. First, the extent to which 'Wahhabism'

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<sup>6</sup> This association between the Al-Saud and the Al-Alshaikh, as Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and his descendants came to be known, translated political loyalty into a religious obligation. According to Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab's teachings, a Muslim must give an oath of allegiance, *bai' ah* to a ruler who is owed allegiance as long as he follows and implements Islamic law. See Ayman al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, London: Westview Press, 1985, pp.26-29.

<sup>7</sup> Turki al-Hamad, *Political Order in Changing Societies- Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 1985, p.73.

formed the *raison d'être* for the creation of the modern Saudi state and the seemingly contradictory and paradoxical attempts of Ibn Saud, a ruler claiming legitimacy through religion to turn to 'non-believers' for support against the Ottoman Porte? Second Ibn Saud's autonomy or lack thereof in his expansionist policy and the role of tribal politics, Ottoman intrigue and the establishment of Britain as the major supporter of the Al-Saud. Third, it shall examine the early years of American interests and subsequent supplanting of Britain as the guarantor of Saudi security and stability. All the while it shall seek to contrast much of the existing scholarship on the history of the Middle East which emphasises the role of Western colonial powers in shaping the political landscape of the region, often underestimating the role of local actors.

### Sources and Methodology

Primary sources consulted for this thesis came from the official archives of Britain and the United States. Documents of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Colonial Office and Cabinet papers were examined at the Public Record Office at Kew. The records of the Government of India pertaining to the Gulf were examined at the India Office Records, British Library, London. U.S. State Department and Defence Department documents were examined at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and Suitland, Maryland.

Papers relating to Congressional Hearings on Petroleum, the records of the Petroleum Administer for War, and the Department of the Interior were consulted at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Other primary sources included the published collections of declassified documents, private papers and memoirs. Secondary sources were consulted at a variety of private and institutional libraries.

Primary and secondary sources were consulted at the following institutions: King Abdul Aziz University Library, Jeddah; King Faisal Foundation Library, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Gellman Library, George



Washington University, Washington, D.C; Bodleian Library, Rhodes House Library and Middle East Centre Library, Oxford University; British Library of Political and Economic Science, LSE, London, Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

While traditional scholars of state formation, such as Tilly, focus on formal institutions-parliaments, bureaucracies, etc., Davis argues that in the case of societies in the Gulf, the ruler must be capable of producing cultural and ideological symbols that tie him to the population.<sup>8</sup> When that linkage fails or when regimes simply rely on distributive methods i.e. circulation of oil wealth, then this may lead to the collapse of authority-as occurred with the Shah of Iran.<sup>9</sup> This thesis supports that view and examines how Abdul Aziz formulated those symbols and then turned against them when it conflicted with realpolitik which has created a constant imbalance in Saudi political legitimacy.

This thesis combines analytical and historical approaches to provide a more complete picture of the underlying motivations of Ibn Saud's domestic and foreign policies. It charts the uneasy dichotomy between economic and security interests on the one hand, and the domestic socio-political pressures stemming from Wahhabi ideology on the other. In doing so it seeks to provide a bridge between earlier historical studies oriented towards state formation and tribal politics with those focused on the political economy of oil in the post Second World War period leading up to the oil crises of 1973. It also provides insight into the origins of the current opposition movement in Saudi Arabia which have been increasingly visible in the post Gulf war period and most especially and tragically since September 2001.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Davis, 'Theorizing Statecraft and Social Change in Arab Oil-Producing Countries' in E. Davis and N. Gavrielides eds., *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991, p. 13.

There are several historical works on Arabia prior to the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saud Arabia. These provide particularly valuable material on specific moments in Arabian history. Most notable are the contributions of Winder who covered the early Saudi-Wahhabi politics in the nineteenth century and Troeller whose interest lay in the 1910-1926 period. Kostiner focuses on aspects of state formation and tribal politics in a valuable study of the 1916-1936 period, as does Helms.<sup>10</sup> Leatherdale's work follows British interests in Arabia from the conquest of Hijaz to the era immediately preceding the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> These works are primarily pre-occupied with examining Ottoman and British interests and often underestimate the importance of Kuwait in the establishment of the Saudi state.

Those that do have an American dimension tend to be written from the perspective of the post-1973 oil boom and as such centre on the economic and political stability of the Kingdom. Important examples include works by Abir, Bligh, Quandt and Safran.<sup>12</sup> The latter two concentrate on Saudi security from the perspective of the United States in light of Cold War politics. Others focus on oil and the political economy of Saudi Arabia. Of these the most notable are by Anderson, Miller, Painter, and Stoff.<sup>13</sup> Barry Rubin provides a lucid examination of Anglo-American

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981; Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State 1916-1936*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia: Britain and the Rise of the House of Sa'ud*, London: Frank Cass, 1976; Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis*, London: Frank Cass, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Oil, Power and Politics: Conflict and Arabia, the Red Sea and the Gulf*, London: Frank Cass, 1974; Alexander Bligh, *From Prince To King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century*, New York: New York University Press, 1984; Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. William Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980's: Foreign Policy, Security, and Oil*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Irvine Anderson, *Aramco, the United States and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy, 1933-1950*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981; Aaron Miller, *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy 1939-1949*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980; David Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; Michael Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil, 1941-1947*, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980;



relations during World War Two. More recent post Gulf war works by Simmons and Vassiliev have focused on current dissent and regime stability.<sup>14</sup> They do provide a historical narrative, yet their sources are exclusively biographies and travel accounts and do not include diplomatic papers or official reports.

One of the most prolific writers on Saudi Arabia has been the British diplomat/adventurer Harry St. John Philby. As an advisor to Ibn Saud he had a unique perspective. His work is a fascinating insight into the rituals of court life, Arabian history and culture. Philby had served as official in the British Indian Government but left service acrimoniously prior to the establishment of the Kingdom. This left him with a life-long disdain for British policy which is reflected in his work. While Leslie McLoughlin provides a worthwhile biography on Ibn Saud, primarily based on other biographies, memoirs and anecdotes, but lacking in its use of diplomatic records. More popular and journalistic accounts of Saudi Arabia also have been written by Robert Lacey, David Holden, Richard Johns, and Said Aburish.<sup>15</sup>

There are two classic works in Arabic dealing with eighteenth and nineteenth century Saudi history. The first is *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, (The Symbol of Glory in the History of Najd) by Uthman Ibn Bishr who died in 1873. The second is Husayn Ibn Ghannam's *Tarikh Najd*. A more contemporary work is the four volume *Shibh al-Jazirah fi ahd al Malik Abd al-Aziz*, published in 1970 and written by a Syrian, Khair al-Din Zirkili who worked in the Saudi Foreign Ministry. However, Zirkili sources much of

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<sup>14</sup> Barry Rubin, *The Great Powers in the Middle East: 1941-1947*, London: Frank Cass, 1980; Geoff Simmons, *Saudi Arabia the Shape of Client Feudalism*, London: Macmillan 1998; Alexei Vassiliev *The History of Saudi Arabia*, London: Saqi Books, 1997. There has been a proliferation of journal articles as well as books focused on post-Gulf war opposition movements. One recent example of note is the informative work by Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Leslie McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom*, London: Macmillan, 1993; Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud*, New York: Avon, 1981; David Holden, and Richard Johns *The House of Saud*, London: Sidgewick and Jackson, 1981; Said Aburish, *The Rise, Corruption and Coming Fall of the House of Saud*, London, Bloomsbury, 1994.

his information from his mentor, fellow compatriot and advisor at the royal court, Sheikh Yusuf Yassin. Though Zirkili provides worthwhile insights into the development of the Kingdom in the twentieth century one must recognise its origins as an 'official view'. One work that could serve as an official history has been produced by Professor Abdullah Salih al-Uthaymeen, Dean of the Department of History at King Saud University, Riyadh. His multi-volume *Tarikh al-Mamlakah al-Arabiyyah al-Suudiyyah* is well past its eighth re-print.<sup>16</sup> It relies extensively on Ibn Bishr, Zirkili, and English writers such as Burkhardt and Philby. Due to the dearth of declassified official documents by the Saudi authorities several contemporary Arabic works on Saudi political history have relied on English language sources. Arabic authors gather material from memoirs, biographies and published collections of declassified documents and translate the information for their own audience.

### Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 examines the life, work and ideology of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and his contribution to the creation of the Al-Saud dynasty. It traces successive attempts by the Al-Saud to establish political entities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in central Arabia. Chapter 2 traces the early influences on Abdul Aziz, his rise as a desert ruler, and the use of religion and tribal politics to establish a polity that was ultimately reliant on settled urban communities. It will examine the influence of the Kuwaiti ruler, Mubarak al-Sabah, and early intrigue against the Ottoman Porte. Chapter 3 introduces a new band of warriors, the Ikhwan, and examines their origins, ideology and their efforts to expand the Saudi polity. Chapter 4 covers the period of the First

<sup>16</sup>Uthman Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, (The Symbol of Glory in the History of Najd), reprinted Riyadh: Matba'at al-Riyadh al-Haditha, no date, 2 vols; Abdullah Saleh Al-Uthaimen, *Tarikh al-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya al-Suudyah*, Riyadh: al-Ubaikan, 2 vols. 1996; Khair al Din Al-Zirkili, *Shibh al-Jazira fi ahd al-Malik Abdul Aziz*, Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 4 parts in 3 Volumes, 1970.

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World War, and Ibn Saud's attempts to obtain British recognition and the policy debates that ensued in Whitehall and India. It also examines the animosity between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein. Chapter 5 details Ibn Saud's post war expansion; the conquest of Hijaz; raids into Iraq and Transjordan, and the subsequent rebellion of the Ikhwan. In this period Ibn Saud succeeds in being accepted by Britain as the main power to back in Arabia. Chapter 6 traces the origin of American interests in Arabia in the 1930's; Ibn Saud's negotiations with the oil company and the development of Saudi-American relations. Chapter 7 examines Anglo-American rivalry over Saudi Arabia as an outcome of the strategic concerns of the Second World War; and also the strategies employed by Washington and London to maintain, what they perceived as, control over Ibn Saud; and the subsequent position of dominance that the United States occupied at the end of the War.

## Chapter 1

### The Creation of a Dynasty:

#### The Rise of the House of Al-Saud Prior to the 20th Century

The tribal origins of the Al-Saud are located deep within the interior of central Arabia—the region of Najd and its core known as the *aridh*.<sup>1</sup> Great deserts surround Najd on three sides. As a plateau Najd is divided into two sections. Upper (*aaliyat*) Najd is composed mainly of hard volcanic rock, gravel and sand. Its thin layer of soil can only sustain scrubs but it is the area in which most of the nomadic populace live. Lower (*safiylat*) Najd has plains of limestone rock and shale. This area receives a greater amount of rainfall. The greener pastures and fertile soil conditions nurtured the growth of towns and agricultural settlements in the area.

The greatest period of growth was from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries when several streams of migrating tribes from the mountainous areas of the west and southwest made their way into Najd.<sup>2</sup> Attracted by the availability of water and the absence of foreign political forces, these tribes sought independence from Hijazi and Yemeni authorities and the Sheikhs of the Gulf coast. The newcomers also altered the demographic makeup of the region. Indigenous tribes of Najd such as the al-Mughira, al-Fudul and al-Katheer faced competition for resources from the newcomers who were primarily from sections of the Anaizah, al-Dhafir, Qahtan, al-Dawasir and Banu Khalid tribes.<sup>3</sup> Control and access to water wells and

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<sup>1</sup> E. Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' Art. XVIII, January 14, 1880 in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIV, 1880, pp. 274-401. A history of the Wahhabi movement forms part of the *Report on Ibn Saud*, January 21, 1918, IOR, L/P&S/18/B270. Another important work on this period is R. Bayley Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Western travellers to the region in the Nineteenth Century that published informative works about this region include: William Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia*, London Macmillan, 1865 Vol. I&II; John L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia*, London: Colburn, 1829; Charles Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1936; G.F. Sadleir, *Diary of a Journey Across Arabia*, 1819, (first published 1866) Cambridge: Oleander, reprinted 1977.

<sup>3</sup>For details about tribal migrations and socio-political conditions of Arabia see John Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd: Its Rise, Development, and Decline*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of



pasture became matters of survival. Only the largest and strongest tribes could guarantee access to them. Weaker tribes were pushed out, sometimes finding refuge among townspeople where they settled and engaged in commerce or shepherding for a livelihood. Some tribes left Najd for other areas; the Bani Lam migrated to southern Iraq, while units of the Shammar and the Anaizah moved north towards Damascus. Further movements were fuelled by the occurrence of several unusually long droughts in the seventeenth century. Yet frequent migrations and changes in tribal power structures were common in Najdi history. A particular tribe could dominate for no more than a hundred years before succumbing to another more powerful one.<sup>4</sup>

All tribes, settled and nomadic, had their own chieftains. In some cases several settlements or tribal groups were under the influence of a one particular chieftain and his family. He would be responsible for securing access to water and pasture whether through agreement to share areas with other tribes or by forcibly holding land and expelling all rivals. It was only when a superior force imposed itself on the area (such as the Ottoman, Saudi or Rashidi powers) that disputes over resources were settled by the established authority. Once that authority receded or was expelled then friction among the tribes returned. Even so, the limited jurisdiction of the chieftains reduced their ability to maintain order to a small area. Caravans and travellers were prone to assaults by robbers when outside the *dira* (tribal area) of a friendly chieftain.<sup>5</sup>

A common form of attack among the beduin tribes was the raid (*ghazw*). Its objective was usually to gain food, supplies and travel animals. Camels were the most popular target because of their high value. The

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Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1978, p.11. See also Uwaidah al-Juhany, *The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis; A Study of Social, Political and Religious Conditions in Najd During Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhabi Reform Movement*, Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. Microfilms Int., Ann Arbor, 1984, pp. 62, 153. Also Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State 1916-1936*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Hereafter cited as MOSA.

<sup>4</sup>al-Juhany, *A History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, pp. 123, 131.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp.165-166. In addition to the caravan trade townspeople also engaged in some agricultural production when they had access to good water wells.

*ghazw* was usually swift and not necessarily bloody. It differed from those raids born out of blood feuds or motivated by the goal of expanding territory—raiders would seek to gain as much booty as possible in a short span of time before fleeing back to their own encampments.<sup>6</sup>

In the struggle for leadership, primogeniture was not the predominant method of gaining power. Although chieftains could be succeeded by their eldest sons, any male relative, brother, cousin, uncle or nephew was an equally eligible candidate. Personality and physical prowess (at hunting, fighting, falconry, etc.), were significant factors in determining who actually took power. Large families often became victims of sibling rivalry, and vicious feuds, as numerous claimants would fight for the chance to attain the highest position. Once in power the chief was considered the legal owner of all land under his control; free to lease, sell or give to whomever he chose. Yet having no standing army of his own, the tribal chieftain relied on loyal members of the tribe to secure the enforcement of his instructions. His effectiveness as ruler often lasted only as long as his prestige. If a chieftain was no longer respected and feared, his leadership could face serious challenges.

Efforts to bolster his support often involved inviting settlers into the tribal *dira* (territory) who would ideally, but not necessarily, be related to the chieftain's clan. These new arrivals would merge with the larger tribe, over time becoming absorbed completely. Their presence increased the size of the chieftain's supporters and broadened the revenue base. In return for permission to settle in his *dira* the chieftain extracted taxes from crops and imposed a form of sales tax, the rate of which varied from family to family depending on the strength of their relationship to the chief.<sup>7</sup> Extending invitations was at the chiefs discretion and could be done to individuals as well as to groups. One such invitation, that was to have lasting impact on

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<sup>6</sup> As'ad AbuKhalil, 'Ghazw' in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, New York; Oxford University Press, 1995. Vol.2, pp.66-67. Hereafter cited as *Oxford Encyclopedia*.

<sup>7</sup> al-Juhany, *A History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, pp. 177, 181.



Najd and Arabia as a whole, was made in 1744 in the Najdi town of Diriyya. Its chief, Muhammad ibn Saud offered sanctuary to Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, a religious scholar who had been persecuted and forced out of his previous home.<sup>8</sup>

Born in the central Najd town of Uyayna in 1703, Abdul Wahhab came from a long line of religious scholars. At the time of his birth his grandfather, Sulayman ibn Ali Musharraf, was the chief *qadi* (judge) of the town and was noted for having studied under the tutelage of the famed scholar of Damascus, Musa al-Hujawi.<sup>9</sup> The young boy received instruction from his grandfather in subjects such as the Qur'an, and principles of Islamic law (*fiqh*). In 1713 Sulayman passed away leaving his post as *qadi* and the responsibility for tutoring Muhammad to his son Abdul Wahhab. Yet in 1727 Abdul Wahhab left Uyayna as a result of a disagreement with the *amir* of Uyayna.<sup>10</sup> Forced to seek patronage elsewhere, his family was welcomed in the neighbouring town of Huraymila. However, even there difficulties arose because Abdul Wahhab's son, Muhammad, was openly critical of the religious practices of the townspeople.

Though the people of Najd had not adopted any other religion, Islamic practices had weakened and there had been a resurgence in rituals of a pre-Islamic and tribal origin. One such example was prayers offered to so called 'holy trees' in order to guarantee safe passage while on a journey;

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<sup>8</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, London: Ernest Benn, 1955, pp.34-35. A biography of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab and history of the early Saudi state can be found in *Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jeddah; July 31, 1955, Vol. 1.

<sup>9</sup> For the history of Najd in the Nineteenth Century there are few surviving Arabic sources written in the period. One of the most significant is *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, (The Symbol of Glory in the History of Najd) by Uthman Ibn Bishr who died in 1873. Reprinted in Riyadh: Matba'at al-Riyadh al-Haditha, no date, 2 vols. See vol. 1, p.6. Philby uses Ibn Bishr extensively in his book *Saudi Arabia*, London: Ernest Benn, 1955. This author has used both sources. One of the first responsibilities assigned to young Muhammad was to complete the rituals of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus at age twelve Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab made the long journey from central Najd to the Hijaz. During his visit he came across a far more diverse culture and population unlike the uniformity of Najd. However, he also found many Hijazi's lax in their religious practices which would later provide the impetus for reform across Arabia.

<sup>10</sup> Uthman Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, Part 1, p.10. Also Derek Hopwood, 'The Ideological Basis: Ibn Abdul Wahhab's Muslim Revivalism' in *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, ed. Tim Niblock, London: Croom Helm, 1982, p.26.



or the prayers made at the graves of pious men asking for worldly success.<sup>11</sup> Although mosques still functioned in some towns, as did the use of the Islamic *sharia*, the use of tribal law and customs or *urf* instead of Islamic law was prevalent.<sup>12</sup> This traditional practice was based on oral custom passed down through the generations and it contrasted with the more text-based Islamic law. In cases involving *urf*, the chief was the final arbitrator and could legislate new laws or annul old ones. Since the *sharia* sought to restrict activities to what was permitted by revelation many chiefs discouraged or restricted the activities of *sharia* judges out of fear of losing their own power to make the law.<sup>13</sup>

Being the son and grandson of judges, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab understood the difficulties of implementing Islamic law when the influence of tribal custom was still strong. He was also in a position to observe the abuse of authority by other judges—which was perhaps encouraged by the harsh conditions in which they functioned. With no formal court buildings or permanent court officials to assist, the *qadi* would often have to dispense his services from his home, the mosque, on the street or in the marketplace. At times the judgements were not written or recorded anywhere and it was not uncommon for the judge to be asked to simply rule in favour of the claimant in return for a gift or payment. Without a fixed income or government subsidy, the *qadi* would often have to supplement their income by other work, although some received stipends from the community or had litigants pay all expenses. However, when this was abused, it resulted in the buying of verdicts, allowing a litigant to bribe the judge to obtain a favorable ruling.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, Part 1, p. 9. Also Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India'

<sup>12</sup> John L. Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedwins and the Wahhabys*, London: Colburn, 1829, Vol.1, pp.288-289.

<sup>13</sup> al-Juhany, *A History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, p.180. Philby's impression of the situation at the time of ibn Abdul Wahhab's youth was one where ; "Islam was definitely the religion of all self respecting people in the towns and villages of Najd; and there was pity, amounting to sympathy, rather than condemnation for the practices of the ignorant". See Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.34.

<sup>14</sup> al-Juhany, *A History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, p.180.

Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab considered paying for legal services as abhorrent and tantamount to bribery.<sup>15</sup> Yet his own father took such payment and was dependent on this system as well as on the patronage of the *amir*. This is perhaps why his father did not share the same exuberance for a forceful change to the status quo that fired his idealistic son. Unable to alter local practice and being perceived by the local leadership as not having the maturity or religious knowledge to be taken seriously, Muhammad became increasingly frustrated. Leaving home seemed to be the best choice and so, with the intention of travelling and studying, he set out to journey to the centres of Islamic learning.

He began in Medina, a city that attracted scholars of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from varying backgrounds and traditions from across the Islamic world. There Muhammad formed important relationships with leading religious figures and subsequently became a student of Sheikh Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi, a noted Hanafi scholar and leader in the Naqshabandi *sufi* order.<sup>16</sup> Through his contacts in Medina Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab gained introductions to scholars in Iraq. Moving to Basra he found tutelage under Sheikh Muhammad al-Majmu'e, a scholar of the Maliki and Shafi'e schools of jurisprudence. It was during his stay in Iraq that Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab developed some of his most notable views. There he witnessed the prolific practice of *ziyarat al-qubur* (visitation of graves) of martyrs and pious persons, notably at the tombs of the grandson and nephew of Prophet Muhammad. The deceased were asked for *tawassul* (intercession) with God on the supplicants behalf.<sup>17</sup> Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was abhorred by this and could accept nor remain silent about its

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284. Also Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India'.

<sup>16</sup>The Naqshbandiyah Sufi order was one of the most prominent in Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and Mesopotamia between the 14th and 18th centuries. Followers of this order were strict in following the sharia and were noted for their shunning of music and dance. Emphasis was on prayer as well as political activism. These qualities seemed to have deeply influenced Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. See Hamid Algar on 'Naqshbandiyah' in *Oxford Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 pp.226-229.

<sup>17</sup>See Ayman al-Yassini on 'Wahhabiyah', *Oxford Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, pp.307-308



practice. His views however, brought him into conflict with local worshippers.

Financially drained yet filled with knowledge and the experiences of his travels Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab decided to return to his family in Huraymila. The relationship with his father was still strained over religious issues, but in deference to him Muhammad did not openly preach until his father's death in 1740.

### The Education of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab

The focus of study for a young scholar at that time was *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tafseer* (the meaning of the Qur'an) and the *hadith* (traditions of the prophet). Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was also influenced by the work of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, a ninth-century scholar (778-855 CE) who founded the Hanbali *fiqh* or school of jurisprudence.<sup>18</sup> Hanbal was noted for his outstanding criticism of the ruling Caliph for allowing Aristotelian philosophy and speculative reasoning, called *kalam*, to enter into the religious schools of thought. The most active proponents of speculative reasoning—the 'Mu'atazila'—sought rational explanations for divine attributes and ventured into the interpretation of anthropomorphic descriptions of God in certain Qura'nic verses.<sup>19</sup> Ahmad ibn Hanbal spoke out against the introspective and divisive field of debate but was jailed for his opposition because the Caliph Al-Mamun himself was sympathetic to the Mu'atazila. It was not until the reign of Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847-861 CE) that Hanbal could teach openly again and his ideas attracted a large following.

A later adherent of Hanbal, Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiya (1263-1328 CE) was to have even more influence on Abdul Wahhab's thought.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ahmad ibn Hanbal was born in Baghdad and studied in both Basra and Hijaz. He had among his teachers notable Hanafi jurists such as Abu Yousef and in addition, the leader of the Shafi'e school, Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'e.

<sup>19</sup>Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, Tr. by Andras and Ruth Hamori, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp.85-87.

<sup>20</sup>Ibn Taymiyah was born in Harran where both his father and grandfather had been leading scholars of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiya,

Ibn Taymiya was noted for his outspoken views against *falsafa* (philosophy), worshipping at gravesites, veneration of saints and the pantheistic practices of some *sufi* orders.<sup>21</sup> He accused the *ulema* of the time of neglect and encouraging the "propagation of sins and heretical innovations" for which they should be punished since it was they "more than others" who had a responsibility to preserve the Islamic *ummah* (community).<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Taymiya was also critical of the blind following of religious practices and refused to accept that *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) was closed.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he asserted that the simple act of declaring faith was not enough to become a true believer, that all of a persons outward actions and inward intentions had to be in accordance with Islamic norms. He viewed the practices of *ziyarat al-qubur* as *bid'a* (an innovation) and something which led to *shirk* (violating the unity of Allah).<sup>24</sup> Those that committed acts of *shirk* were to be fought, even killed, even if they claimed to profess faith.

Ibn Taymiya looked to the *salaf al-saleh* (the first three generations of Muslims) to serve as manifestations of the proper Islamic model.<sup>25</sup> That generation was to have set the highest examples of leadership and Islamic living. Subsequent scholars had the duty of ensuring that same model was continued. The *umara* (rulers) were to ensure the implementation of Islamic laws and prevent *bid'a* (innovations) from diluting that inherited model.

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*Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Wasitiyah*, Riyadh: Darrusalam Publishers, 1996, p.9. Also Richard Martin, and Mark Woodward, *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, pp. 123-125.

<sup>21</sup>Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiya, *Mukhtaser Iqtida al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*, Riyadh: Darrussalam Publishers 1996, pp. 129-133. Also Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.110-111

<sup>22</sup>Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiya, *al Hisba fi al-Islam* (Public Duties in Islam: The Institution of the Hisba) Tr. by Muhtar Holland, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1992, pp.131-132.

<sup>23</sup>Iyad Hilal, *Studies in Usul al-Fiqh*, Walnut, CA, Islamic Cultural Workshop, (no date), p.129-131.

<sup>24</sup>Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiya, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Wasitiyah*, pp.11-12. Also Ronald Nettler on 'Ibn Taymiyah' in *Oxford Encyclopedia*, Vol.2 pp.165-166. The Mongol invasion had a deep impact on Ibn Taymiya; his family had to move to Damascus to avoid a brutal Mongol occupation; and the activities of certain non-Muslim minority groups at the time led to his belief that they should be treated harshly for their betrayal.



Ibn Taymiya's view was that as long as the *amir* (ruler) fulfilled this duty then he was to be obeyed. Only if there was a clear violation of Islamic law could his removal be justified. Even if the leader was harsh and oppressive the *ulema* had a responsibility to try and correct him before trying to remove him. Ibn Taymiya described it thus:

Everyone to whom obedience is paid is one of those in command, and every one of these is under obligation to command what Allah has commanded and to forbid what he has forbidden. And everyone who owes them obedience is obliged to obey them in obedience to Allah, and not to obey them in defiance of Allah.<sup>26</sup>

Ibn Taymiya was fiercely opposed to the Mongol rulers because he saw them publicly claiming to be adherents of Islam but in reality working to undermine it. He lashed out at some *ulema* for subverting the faith of believers by not fulfilling their duty to Islam, seeking instead to ingratiate themselves with the new leadership. They were violating the unifying principle that kept the Islamic community together; that of *tawheed* and instead, tolerated the expression of *shirk* manifested in Mongol rule.

*Tawheed* literally means 'oneness' and unity of God. Yet the essence of this concept was not confined simply to belief, it was also supposed to manifest itself in a person's speech, actions, and even emotions. Ibn Taymiya wrote passionately about *tawheed* and this would later greatly influence the young mind of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab who considered *tawheed* the "eternal religion of God" and "the religion of Islam itself".<sup>27</sup> To understand the beliefs of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab more about this should be said. The concept of *tawheed* is comprised of three main elements:<sup>28</sup>

First, *tawheed al-rububiyah*; the unity of Lordship, required the belief that God was the Creator of all things and did not depend on anything for

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<sup>25</sup>Taqi al Din Ibn Taymiya, *Muqdimah fi Amwal al-Tafseer* (An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer) tr. by Muhammad Ansari, Birmingham, UK: Hidayah 1993, pp. 12-16

<sup>26</sup>Ibn Taymiya, *al-Hisba fi al-Islam*, p.117.

<sup>27</sup>Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed* Riyadh: Dar al-Salaam Publishing, 1986, p.14.

<sup>28</sup>A.A.Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed*, Riyadh: Tawheed Publications, 1990, pp.5-26 provide detailed description of these concepts.

sustenance. The fact that living things or objects had the ability to move, change and grow was because God gave them permission to do so. Furthermore a person's fortune or misfortune were to be considered tests from God and not the result of using charms, amulets, potions or other superstitious devices. Man's actions were the result of his choices, a good result could come from a bad situation, and vice-versa, but all were tests of faith. To believe otherwise or rely on the zodiac, good luck charms or to have fear of black cats and broken mirrors were contradictory to this aspect of *tawheed*.<sup>29</sup>

Second, *tawheed al-asmaa wa al-sifaat*; embodied the concept of the unity of God's names and attributes, whereby God must be referred to according to the descriptions in the Quran without adding meaning to the names or inferring other meanings. His attributes were similar to human beings in name only not in degree, thus when God is said to be 'seeing and hearing' it is taken in the absolute sense without the limitations that humans have. This was an issue because of the philosophical arguments that arose over the concept of the nature of God and Ibn Taymiya had strong views about the dangers of indulging in such discourse.

Third, *tawheed al-ibadah* or *tawheed al-ilahiya*; unity of worship, where prayer and worship were to be directed towards God only. No intercessors between man and God were acceptable, whether pious men or prophets. Worship or *ibada*, in this case also includes having love for, trust in and fear of God. The fulfilment of worship was the adherence to the commandments and abstention from the prohibitions of God's law in all areas of public and private life. Not following or implementing the *sharia*, for example, would be a violation of this part of *tawheed*.

However, in the time of Ibn Taymiya many of these principles were not followed. The prevalence of *kalam* and the practice of *ziyarat al qubur* were examples of the violations of *tawheed al asmaa wa al-sifat* and *tawheed*

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. See also Qura'n, chapter : verse 39:62, 64:11 and 2:155.



*al-ibadah*.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, supplications addressed to saints or to the Prophet Muhammad were considered acts of *shirk* (associating partners with God), and forms of idolatry.<sup>31</sup> A Muslim who indulged in these practices was considered a hypocrite and should be fought, even killed.<sup>32</sup> Though the people of Arabia had not formally adopted any other religion besides Islam their actions and superstitions went against what *tawheed* represented and for that reason Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was motivated to change society. He also believed that if a believer willingly followed a leader or obeyed the laws of a group or society that did not uphold the principles of *tawheed* then he had become an unbeliever. He declared that anyone "who makes a judgment other than by the book of Allah is a *kafir*" and "all *taghut* are *kafir*".<sup>33</sup> *Taghut* referred to those forces which compete for man's attention such as tribalism, nationalism etc. Beduin customary law (*urf*) and Ottoman law were considered to be among the *taghut*.<sup>34</sup>

*Shirk* too, could be committed in many ways; *shirk al-iddiya*: worshipping other than Allah, *shirk al niyya wa al-irada wa al-qasd* – having the intention or will to violate the principles of *tawheed*; *shirk al-ta'a* – obeying and accepting rulers who were themselves in a state of *shirk*; and *shirk al-mahabba* – loving something more than God.<sup>35</sup> The guardians of *tawheed* were, as ibn Taymiya stated, those "who hold command" (i.e. the scholars and leaders). Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahhab was therefore conscious of the need to secure political backing of an *amir* in order to establish a proper Islamic entity (*dawla islamiya* or *dar al-Islam*) where the *sharia* would be enforced and innovations quashed. His ideas have often

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<sup>30</sup>*Kalam* was the practice of theological speculation where doctrines considered beyond human comprehension (such as the nature and essence of God) were debated and analyzed in order to develop rational explanations for them. See Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.85.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed*, pp.130-131.

<sup>32</sup> Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed*, pp.5-26.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p.26. *kafir* literally means 'one who conceals the truth' but is often simply translated as unbeliever. Cited in Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, pp.88-89.

<sup>34</sup> Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedwines and the Wahhabys*, vol.1 pp. 288-289. Qura'nic references to these subjects can be found in Chapter 3 verses 31-32, 16:36 and 4:80.

been referred to as 'Wahhabi' but neither he nor his followers used that term. Rather his followers described themselves as *ahl al-tawheed* (people of unity) or the Muwahhidun (unitarians).

### The Search for Political Legitimacy: Alliance and Empire 1744-1818

After his period of travel, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab returned to Huraymila and though in his mid-thirties, still deferred to his father and did not publicly preach his views. The ideas of the son were still not welcome in the community and his father was keen to avoid embarrassment to the family.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, during this period Muhammad was able to produce *kitab al-tawheed*, a book which outlined many of his basic thoughts and principles. It was not until the death of his father in 1740 that Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab allowed himself to preach openly. Initially he secured the patronage of Uthman ibn Muammar the *amir* of Uyayna, the town where he had been born and where his family had prestige. Muammar offered protection and instructed his people to follow the teachings of their new *imam*, now referred to as Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. The marriage into Muammar's family solidified the relationship between the two men.<sup>37</sup>

With the political backing of Muammar and the men of Uyayna at his disposal Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was able to implement the Muwahhidun principles and begin reforms. As the *imam* and chief *qadi* he started implementing *sharia* laws in many areas. Crimes of theft and murder were punished with amputation and beheading. Domes and mausoleums erected upon the tombs of holy men (i.e. the 'companions' of Prophet Muhammad) were demolished. Books were destroyed if they did not fit the interpretation of the Muwahhidun doctrine. The practices of

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<sup>35</sup> Sheikh Abdul Rahman ibn Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab in *Majmu'at al Tawheed* ed. by Rashid Rida, Cairo: al-Manar, 1927. Cited in Helms, *Cohesion*, p.91

<sup>36</sup> Derek Hopwood, 'The Ideological Basis: Ibn Abdul Wahhab's Muslim Revivalism' in *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia*, ed., Tim Niblock, London: Croom Helm, 1982, p.29.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, vol.1 pp. 9-10.



praising the rulers in the Friday sermons and special prayers for the Prophet were forbidden.<sup>38</sup> In addition other *ulema*, were criticised for their complacency, accused of corruption and weakness and for failing to end religious innovation (*bid'a*). They were to blame for the ignorance and lack of religious education of the public.

In response, the established *ulema* accused ibn Abdul Wahhab of not following the *sharia* himself by creating trouble and encouraging people to revolt against their lawful *amirs*. One chief in particular, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Humaidi, was particularly angered by this incitement. Al-Humaidi was head of the powerful Banu Khalid tribe in the eastern region of al-Hasa. It was through his ports that much of the trade with Uyayna was conducted. Sulayman threatened to impose economic sanctions on Uyayna if Uthman ibn Muammar did not expel the aggravating Sheikh.<sup>39</sup> Unable to withstand the pressure from al-Humaidi, Muammar was forced to comply. He arranged for one of his men to escort the Sheikh out of town. According to an account by Harry Philby, the escort had orders to kill the Sheikh once beyond the town limits, but the task proved too difficult for the man and Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was able to leave safely.<sup>40</sup>

Abdul Wahhab found refuge in the town of Diriyah in 1744. The people of Diriyah had a long rivalry with the Banu Khalid and several prominent residents of the town including relatives of its *amir*, Muhammad ibn Saud, had adopted Muwahhidun concepts.<sup>41</sup> It is to the *amir's* wife, Mudhi, that some accounts attribute the success of convincing Muhammed ibn Saud to give patronage to the Sheikh.<sup>42</sup> She prevailed despite the

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<sup>38</sup>al-Yassini, *Religion and State*, pp.24-25.

<sup>39</sup>Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' p. 278. The Banu Khalid territory lay between Najd and the Gulf coast and were in a position to threaten vital trade routes which passed through al-Hasa.

<sup>40</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.38.

<sup>41</sup>J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, London: 1913, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VII, p. 1053. Also *Report on Ibn Saud*, January 21, 1918, PRO, IOR L/P&S/18/B270.

<sup>42</sup>Leslie McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom*, London: Macmillan, 1993, p.7. Also Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.39 ; al-Yassini *Religion and State*, p.25 ; Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 274-401. This was done over the protests of Thunayyan ibn Saud, the *amir* brother who opposed the alliance.

protests of her brother-in-law, Thunayyan Ibn Saud, who opposed any alliance with Abdul Wahhab. The Saudi-Muwahhidun (sometimes referred to by other authors as Saudi-Wahhabi) alliance that began in 1744 was to impact greatly on Arabian politics well into the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

The first two years of the Sheikh's stay were spent in spreading the call of the return to the 'proper practice' of Islam. He taught and lectured and wrote letters to neighboring rulers and notables enjoining them to follow the path of *tawheed*.<sup>44</sup> Encouraging unity based on a brotherhood of faith and not along tribal bonds, Abdul Wahhab hoped to initiate a change in the mentality of the beduins. He warned of the seriousness of committing *shirk* and disobeying the commands of Allah. He reinforced and legitimized Muhammad ibn Saud's rule by exhorting people to obey their *amir*. Following ibn Taymiya's argument on obedience to rulers, the Sheikh taught that as long as the *sharia* was implemented, Muhammad ibn Saud could not be opposed and that to defy their Islamic leader was against the faith. Those that did not manifest their faith in their actions would be fought and killed.<sup>45</sup>

With the patronage of the *amir* of Diriyah, Abdul Wahhab was able to preach his ideas openly and began to propagate them among the people of Najd without fear. After building a base of support and an understanding of his ideas he began the second part of 'commanding the good and forbidding the evil' which was physical action. From 1746, Muhammad ibn Saud's men began their forays into neighboring towns to implement the rule of the *sharia*. Those towns that resisted were fought until they submitted. The Sheikh also secured from Muhammad ibn Saud a pledge to receive a fifth of all revenues and booty which could be spent on

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<sup>43</sup>al-Juhany, *A History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, p.288. The descendants of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab are often known by family name of 'al Al-Sheikh'.

<sup>44</sup>al-Yassini, Ayman. 'Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab' in *Oxford Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, pp.159-160.

<sup>45</sup>Ibn Taymiya, *al-Hisba fi al-Islam*, p.117.



what he saw fit.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Abdul Wahhab controlled all areas of religious, educational and judicial concern.

The two decades following the alliance saw the expansion and consolidation of territory. Tribal chiefs from al-Hasa in the east, Najran in the southwest and Hijaz in the west made various attempts to keep the Muwahhidun warriors of Najd confined to central Arabia. Though they came close to success on several occasions they were unable to remove the challengers from the scene completely. Najd had the support from tribes that were either convinced of the Muwahhidun call, or who sought to benefit from *ghazw* or those who were simply afraid of being the victims of *ghazw* themselves. In any event, Muwahhidun forces always managed to resupply themselves.<sup>47</sup> This struggle did not stop at the death, in 1765, of Muhammad ibn Saud. His son Abdul Aziz simply stepped in and was given the pledge of allegiance (*bai'a*). Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab continued to give his support and advice to the new *amir* and carried on his programme of religious reform.<sup>48</sup>

This period was also observed by one of the first Europeans to venture into Arabia, certainly the first serious explorer, Carsten Niebuhr. He was a Dutch officer in the Corps of Engineers on a surveying mission chartered by King Frederick V. <sup>49</sup> The King sought to gain a greater understanding of the Bible by examining the geography, culture and languages of the Middle East and the Holy Lands. In 1762 Niebuhr visited Jeddah on the Red Sea and during 1764-1765 travelled along the eastern coast of Arabia where he learned of the spread of the Saudi-Muwahhidun alliance. Though he was a contemporary of Muhammad ibn Abdul

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<sup>46</sup>al-Yassini, *Religion and State*, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup>Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988 p.10.

<sup>48</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol.II, Chapter VII, p. 1054. Also *Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia*, 1955, Vol.1, pp.120-121.

<sup>49</sup> The court of the King had drawn up a 235 page dossier full of questions to which it sought answers. The questions covered geographical, linguistic, sociological and zoological topics. It was the objective of the mission to answer as many of the questions as possible. As a result of this mission Niebuhr became the first European to accurately



Wahhab the two men never met and it appears that he was able to appreciate the underlying purpose of the Muwahhidun mission. Niebuhr's comments made 167 years before the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia are prophetic: "It has already produced a revolution in the government of Arabia, and will probably hereafter influence the state of this country still further."<sup>50</sup>

Niebuhr was part of a six strong team but none of the others managed to survive the harsh climate, the ravages of disease, and the long journey home. Niebuhr's determination and will to survive was matched by his curiosity and interest in learning. He was fascinated not only in the geography and history of the Arabia but in flora and fauna as well. Niebuhr also seems to have made a genuine effort to understand local people, seeking out the common man, the merchant, student and religious leaders to learn their ways and ideas. His work was a major contribution to the understanding of the region in his time. Though his knowledge of Islam and Arabian politics was limited prior to his travels he seems to have gained considerable grasp of both:

The Musulman religion, as professed by the Sunnites, is surely far different from what it was instituted by Mahomet. This sect follow the authority of some commentators, who explain the Alcoran by their own whimsies, and exalt their private opinions into doctrines of the Mahometan system. It acknowledges a long train of saints, who are invoked in cases of necessity, and to whom many absurd miracles are ascribed, and these said to have been wrought in favour of persons who addressed themselves to the saints, in preference to God. It gives faith to the virtues of amulets, and the efficacy of foolish vows. In short, it has gradually adopted many pieces of superstition, which are condemned in the Alcoran, and justified only by the strained interpretations of the Doctors...The new religion of Abd ul Wahheb deserves therefore to be regarded as a reformation of Mahometism, reducing it back to its original simplicity. He has gone further than some other reformers: but an Arab can hardly be expected to act in such matters with a delicate hand. <sup>51</sup>

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calculate the height of the pyramids in Egypt and had also to visit the cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq. See Robin Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia*, Garnet: Reading, 1994, pp.32-49.

<sup>50</sup>Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia, and Other Countries in the East*, Translated by Robert Heron, Edinburgh: R.Morrison and Son, 1792. Reprinted 1994, Reading: Garnet Pub, Vol. 2, p.131. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932.

<sup>51</sup>Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia, and Other Countries in the East*, pp.135-136.



Unfortunately, few historical accounts refer to Niebuhr and this author could not find reference to his contribution to the history of Arabia in the works of, al-Yassini, Kostiner, Lacey or Safran.<sup>52</sup> Yet Hogarth said that he knew of no serious explorer who did not consult Niebuhr's work before embarking on a trip to Arabia or who did not end up quoting him on his return.<sup>53</sup>

By 1770, much of the peninsula, with the exception of Yemen, was under Muwahhidun influence. In the north, raids were carried out into Mesopotamia and Syria to the outskirts of Damascus, thus placing important caravan and pilgrim routes from the centre of the Ottoman empire under Saudi dominance.<sup>54</sup> In 1773, Riyadh, the chief city in Najd was finally taken—thus vindicating Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. At age seventy he had spent almost thirty years guiding his followers and supporting the House of Al-Saud. In return he had been entrusted with the responsibility for all religious, educational, and judicial issues. Now in semi-retirement, he let the *amirs* of the Al-Saud broaden the boundaries of the realm. Thus the Sheikh lived long enough to influence the first two *amirs* of the Saudi-Muwahhidun entity. Moreover, he was able to inculcate his ideas into the minds of sons and grandsons of the Al-Saud family who would themselves be taking future leadership roles. When in 1792 Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab himself passed away his four sons continued their father's work. In his lifetime he had seen the creation of a polity that had come to dominate a considerable portion of Arabia.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud*, New York: Avon, 1981; al-Yassini, *Religion and State*; Safran, *Saudi Arabia*; Kostiner, *MOSA*. Meanwhile Niebuhr's historic contribution was recognised as early as 1880 by Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 274-401.

<sup>53</sup>Hogarth, quoted in the Introduction to Niebuhr's *Travels Through Arabia*, 1994 reprint, p.VI.

<sup>54</sup>Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VII, p. 1054. The precedent established in this time of raiding up to the Euphrates and to the outskirts of Damascus was used in the twentieth century by Abdul Aziz ibn Saud to increase the size of his territory during the Uqair conference of 1922 where boundary agreements with Iraq and Transjordan were being discussed.



The one area where Muwahhīdun operations were slow to penetrate was the western region of Hijaz where the ruler, the Sharif of Mecca, Ghalib ibn Musa'd was opposed to the Muwahiddun/Wahhabi polity.<sup>55</sup> The strength of Ghalib's rule varied, and was dependent upon the success of his manipulation of tribal differences and distribution of largesse. Yet he did successfully challenge the encroachment of the Saudi-Muwahhīdun forces. Much of the 1790's was spent in battle, with neither side achieving a decisive victory. <sup>56</sup> In 1799, after many stalemates, a truce was finally agreed in which Sharif Ghalib was recognised as having jurisdiction over Mecca, as well as the Utayba and Harb tribal territories and all of northern Asir.<sup>57</sup> Abdul Aziz and his men were invited to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca and to celebrate the Eid festival. However this nearly led to further clashes when the boisterous Hijazi ceremonies included singing and dancing which inflamed the Muwahhīdun sensitivities.<sup>58</sup> Abdul Aziz abruptly withdrew his men before an incident occurred and turned their attention eastwards.

The city of Karbala, in Iraq was famous for the tomb of Hussain, grandson of the Prophet. Its presence was a matter of immense local pride and it was a site that attracted numerous worshippers. To the strict

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<sup>55</sup>Using Turkish sources from Istanbul and Baghdad, Gerald de Gaury in his book *Rulers of Mecca* provides an interesting history of Hijaz and the office of Sharif of Mecca. See Gerald DeGaury, *Rulers of Mecca*, New York: Roy Publishers, 1949, especially pp. 177-207.

<sup>56</sup> Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp.281-282.

<sup>57</sup> DeGaury, *Rulers of Mecca*, p.181

<sup>58</sup>Charles Didier, *Sojourn with the Grand Sharif of Makkah*, tr. by Richard Boulind, Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1985, pp.8, 55, and 63. This is an account of a French traveller who visited the Hijaz during the period 1854-1856. Didier observed grand mausoleums constructed over the tombs of pious saints and the long robes which the people wore were deemed ostentatious by the Muwahhīdun who kept their robes short and above the ankle so as not to 'waste' cloth and be arrogant. Another practice Didier described was the 'branding' of male children on the fortieth day of their birth with deep incisions, three on each cheek and two on the temple. The scars were permanent and identified the person as being from the 'Holy Land'. Among the beduin, superstitions and occult beliefs abounded. Trees that were considered 'holy' could be found strewn with pieces of cloth placed by travellers to ward off evil spirits. Sacrificing camels was also done as parts of exorcism ceremonies. These customs were also vividly described in the *Safarnameh* of Mirza Mohammed Hosayn Farhani, (tr. by H. Farmayan and E. Daniel as 'A Shi'ite Pilgrimage to Mecca 1885-1886' Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.225-228.). Farhani was an Iranian notable who wrote an account of his pilgrimage journey. An



interpretations of ibn Abdul Wahhab the veneration of any man was antithetical to Islam.<sup>59</sup> In 1801 Abdul Aziz lead a force of roughly 10,000 men and 6,000 camels to attack the city.<sup>60</sup> Several thousand people were killed, the tomb and other gravesites were pillaged and the city plundered.<sup>61</sup> Unlike attacks in and around Najd, the Saudi forces did not seek to obtain territorial control nor did they seek to establish their sovereignty or extract tribute from the people. Such an occupation would likely result in the dispatch of the Ottoman army. Abdul Aziz chose to attack and then retreat, allowing his men to enjoy their plunder and giving them a boost of morale.<sup>62</sup>

It is ironic that during the lifetime of the Sheikh such a campaign against a major site of Shi'i pilgrimage was not initiated. Indeed with the reputation of ibn Abdul Wahhab and his followers for enacting strict punishments against violators of Muwahiddun principles it is surprising that the most notorious act which the Muwahhidun army embarked upon, occurred almost a decade after the death of the Sheikh. Especially since that incident was in itself part of what made the reputation of the Muwahhidun. The Karbala attack highlights the differences between raids during the lifetime of the Sheikh and those after his death. Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was primarily a teacher and a man of scholarly debate. Even though he promulgated strong verdicts against those who 'deviated from the faith', he was realistic and politically pragmatic.

Although his support for the Al-Saud legitimized their rule there was no standing army assigned to the task of spreading the faith. Rather, conscripts were drawn from beduin tribes and towns. The Sheikh rallied

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elaborately decorated version of his book was presented to the Qajar ruler Naseruddin Shah in 1887.

<sup>59</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol.II, Chapter VII, p. 1059. See also David Edens, 'The Anatomy of the Saudi Revolution' in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5, 1974, pp.50-64; Philby *Saudi Arabia*, pp. 92-93. .

<sup>60</sup> Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India', p.284.

<sup>61</sup> Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p. 91and Philby *Saudi Arabia*, p.93.

<sup>62</sup>This was not the first time that Karbala had been attacked and the ornate graveyards levelled. In 851 the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil also destroyed the tombs to curtail the growing importance placed on shrines by Shi'a inhabitants. See Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Vol. 1, part 1, pp. 179-180.



his followers to rebel against the Ottomans who had 'left their religion' by adopting foreign practices. Those that joined the struggle were promised 'paradise' through martyrdom while those that lived could look forward to their share of booty, in addition to a reward from the almighty.<sup>63</sup> It was through the appeal of both 'worldly' treasures and reward in the 'afterlife' that the beduin were drawn into the Muwahhīdun cause.

Within two years of the attack on Karbala Abdul Aziz had launched major assaults westwards into the Hijaz. In May 1803 he wrested control of the holy city of Mecca from the grasp of Sharif Ghalib.<sup>64</sup> The defeated leader and the *ulema* of Mecca were obliged to pledge their allegiance (*bai'a*) to Abdul Aziz and acknowledge their acceptance of Muwahhīdun principles. To the surprise of many local merchants the conquerors did not prohibit trade and ensured that business continued as usual. However, the social and moral codes of the city were made stricter, prohibiting music and tobacco, but they were more fortunate than the inhabitants of previous Muwahhīdun conquests; many of whom met their deaths.

For Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, the victorious capture of the holy city was short lived. Upon his return to Diriyya, he was attacked and killed after Friday prayers by a man who sought to avenge the death of his sons in the raid on Karbala. Succession was granted to his son Saud who was already an experienced leader.<sup>65</sup> Determined to continue his father's legacy Saud organised his forces to capture the city of Medina—where some practices, especially by visiting pilgrims, did much to inflame Muwahhīdun sensibilities. The tomb of the Prophet had become a mausoleum, adorned with gifts and had turned into a site for pilgrims to pray for intercession with the Almighty.<sup>66</sup> The new ruler had extraneous decoration pieces

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<sup>63</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh 'Wahhabite Polity' in *Arabia and the Gulf: From Traditional to Modern States*, ed. I.R. Netton, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1986, pp. 75-91.

<sup>64</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.95 and DeGaury, *Rulers of Mecca*, p.186.

<sup>65</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VII, pp.1062-1063.

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab had been extremely critical of superstition surrounding trees and devoted a chapter in his *Kitab al-Tawheed* against it. See ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawheed* Chapter 9. Part of the ritual of tree worship included tearing off a piece of clothing and hanging it on the tree to keep evil spirits away. Another practice involved the slaughtering of a camel to rid a town of disease or a bad omen. The animal would be first



removed from the tomb. Prayers to the dead and other unorthodox rituals were banned. This made Saud unpopular among some, but the people undoubtedly feared him.

Having secured the two holy cities Saud was in a powerful position. Though he had taken the role of *amir*, he did not alter the political status quo, choosing to allow Sharif Ghalib to remain a figurehead leader—albeit to forestall an immediate Ottoman attack. Saud did, however, appoint a new *qadi* in Mecca who was to ensure that the religious practices of the people followed the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. Who better to serve that function than the grandson of the 'great Sheikh' himself Sulayman ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab.<sup>67</sup> This was followed by other appointments of members of the family of ibn Abdul Wahhab to judicial positions throughout Hijaz. These judges were to dispense their services without taking payment of any kind from the locals. In case of disagreement with a particular verdict, the appeals could be lodged directly with the *amir*, thus giving Saud the ultimate power of veto.

Collections for the public treasury, or *bayt al-mal* were undertaken by special agents appointed by Saud, who taxed merchant capital and received a portion of raiding booty.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, in typical beduin chief style, Saud entertained the noble and the poor at his *majlis* and proffered gifts to respected guests. He successfully extended influence throughout western Arabia, reigning in wayward tribes and raiding heavily into Syria right up to Damascus and Aleppo. This balance of military success and diplomatic manoeuvring was essential to the maintenance of effective rule and would have been successful if it were not for the determination of Constantinople to exact its revenge.

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led around the town where it was believed it would absorb evil spirits and then it would be sacrificed which was thought to kill the bad omen. These examples can be found in Didier, *Sojourn With the Sharif*, pp.8 and 63. See also Edens, 'The Anatomy of the Saudi Revolution' pp.50-64.

<sup>67</sup> al-Yassini. *Religion and State*, p.43.

<sup>68</sup> Didier, *Sojourn With the Sharif*, p.97. Also Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part.I, Vol. I, p.179.

### Ottoman and Egyptian Intervention in Arabia <sup>69</sup>

The Ottoman response to the loss of Hijaz was slow. European intrigue and conflict in the Central Asian provinces diverted the attention of an already weakened Caliphate. Beleaguered in Constantinople, Sultan Selim III delegated the task of recapturing the holy places to Muhammad Ali of Egypt. However, Ali had problems of his own with the Mamluk dynasty and took time to consolidate his power in Egypt before acting on the order.<sup>70</sup> In fact Muhammad Ali's force, consisting largely of Albanian soldiers and led by his son Tusun, did not land in Hijaz until October 1811, seven years after Saud captured Mecca. Marching northwards towards Sinai, the soldiers took territory where there were fewer strongholds of the Al-Saud before making an attempt, in early 1812, on the key city of Medina. Due to the allegiance of many local tribes Saud was forewarned of the advancing army. He moved first to catch the attackers in an ambush as they passed through a valley. The overconfident Egyptian force was caught by surprise and forced to retreat with many casualties.<sup>71</sup>

Tusun would have to wait the best part of a year for reinforcements to arrive from Egypt and in the meantime he began a campaign to win over local tribal chiefs with gifts and bribes. Thus when reinforcements finally did arrive in October 1812 he was able to field a combined beduin-Egyptian force to lay siege on the city of Medina. His tight hold forced the city to

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<sup>69</sup>Egyptian operations in Arabia and a history of Wahhabi power in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are provided in detail in a War Office report of January 21, 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B270/P337. Also Lorimer *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol. II pp.1081-1093. See also M.W.Daly, ed. *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2Vols, and Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, especially Chapter 2.

<sup>70</sup>Muhammad Ali became the *wali* (governor) of Egypt in 1805 when the Ottoman Sultan was forced to appoint him in order to maintain the delicate political situation following the French withdrawal. Ali was concerned from the beginning that the Sultan would try and remove him. It was possible that the mission to the Hijaz was designed to distract him and stretch his resources to exhaustion. Nevertheless Ali also realised that controlling the holy cities would give him immense prestige in the Muslim world and provide him a staging area for other conquests. See Daly, Vol.2 pp.139-146. Also Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 322-325.

<sup>71</sup>Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, Part I, pp. 155-156; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, pp.1080-1085. Also Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol.2 p.198 and the *Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia*, 1955, Vol. 1, p.136.



surrender within a fortnight—boosting Tusun's confidence and his troops morale immeasurably.<sup>72</sup> He went on to take Mecca in January 1813. The successes brought more beduins looking for booty to Tusun's camp. Saud found he was unable to retain beduin allegiance when they sensed better spoils with the Egyptian side. Being half way across the peninsula in Diriyya, he could do little to ensure the Hijazi tribes stayed in line. Before Saud could organise a Najdi force to re-take Hijaz, he died suddenly in April 1814.<sup>73</sup>

Leadership was handed over to Saud's son, Abdullah who took over at a difficult time. Battlefield losses and tribal defections meant that he had quickly to reassert control and establish undisputed authority among the tribes.<sup>74</sup> Matters were complicated when a great uncle (the brother of his grandfather), challenged the young leader and tried to claim his own right to rule based on being the son of Muhammad ibn Saud—the dynastic founder. Tension increased within the family and among the tribes as the issue of rightful succession was debated. Abdullah ibn Saud eventually staved off the challenge from his great uncle but could not repair the damage to Muwahiddun unity. Sensing this weakness, more opportunistic beduin tribes defected to the Egyptian side.<sup>75</sup> With the Al-Saud weakened and confined mainly to Najd, Tusun seemed confident he had put an end to the threat. Reluctant to engage in further bloody battles he secured a treaty with Abdullah ibn Saud that maintained the status quo and in which the Muwahiddun would give up their claims to the Hijaz. With a treaty negotiated, Tusun returned to Egypt in November 1815, whereupon he contracted plague and died shortly thereafter.<sup>76</sup>

In the absence of a strong Egyptian presence Abdullah ibn Saud began to re-assert his authority in the peninsula. Muhammad Ali, incensed

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<sup>72</sup> Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, Part I, pp. 157-158. Also Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 322-325.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd*, Part I, p.176

<sup>74</sup> D.G. Hogarth, *A History of Arabia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922, p.104. Didier, *Sojourn With the Sharif*, p.103. Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, p.1082.

<sup>75</sup> War Office Report, January 21, 1918, PRO, IOR L/P&S/18/B270/P337.

<sup>76</sup> Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol. 2 p.201

by this violation of the treaty, sent his elder son Ibrahim to the Hijaz with a heavily armed contingent of soldiers in September 1816.<sup>77</sup> Their mission was to reach into the heart of Arabia and destroy the Saudi power base in Najd. Following the tactics of Tusun, Ibrahim began by undermining the web of tribal alliances that was the backbone of the Al-Saud's strength. Through money, guns and gifts, tribe after tribe was seduced to the Egyptian side. As Ibrahim pushed towards Najd, sections of Mutayr and Harb tribesman defected to join him. Abdullah Al-Saud could not provide strong leadership nor promise sufficient booty to keep them in his fold. Moreover, many tribes saw this as an opportunity to escape the tax and tribute they were required to pay as part of their allegiance to the Najdi *amir*.

Despite Ibrahim's desire for a swift victory, his army of over five thousand soldiers and a dozen artillery guns, directed by a French engineer, lay siege around Diriyya for more than six months. Abdullah ibn Saud eventually agreed to surrender in the hope that the town and his family would be spared. However, Muhammad Ali was not a magnanimous victor. Upon hearing that his army had Najd virtually in their grasp he ordered Diriyyah's houses to be ripped down and burnt—the town's walls were to be shelled into pulp. Several hundred members of the Al-Saud and ibn Abdul Wahhab families were expelled from Najd and brought to Cairo. Shortly thereafter Abdullah Al-Saud was moved to Constantinople where he was publicly executed for treason.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile Ibrahim was instructed to proceed through Najd and the surrounding territories to destroy any remaining pockets of Saudi/Muwahhidun sympathisers. The defeat of the Al-Saud reduced the importance of central Arabia as Saudi power was crushed, returning Najd to tribal feuding.

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<sup>77</sup> P.M. Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent 1516-1922*, London: Longmans, 1966, p. 180.

<sup>78</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part. 1, Vol. II p. 1090; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd* part I p. 207; Holt, *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent 1516-1922*, p. 180. See also Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.16-18, Hogarth *A History of Arabia* p.105; Lacey *The Kingdom*, p.62 and Safran *Saudi Arabia*, p.13 for details of the destruction of Diriyya.



Muhammad Ali had no interest in maintaining permanent garrisons there and retired his forces to the western coast of Hijaz.<sup>79</sup>

### European Penetration

Ironically, the destruction of the Saudi entity opened the way for greater European penetration of Arabia. Muhammad Ali of Egypt, anxious to obtain approval of his rule indulged the requests of curious and adventurous Europeans who sought to explore the interior of Arabia. The famous Bruckhardt expedition was provided with an escort and allowed unprecedented access by a non-Muslim to Mecca and Medina. French officers and Italian doctors were feted with Egyptian hospitality on their trips into Asir and the Hijaz. Britain, though not entirely displeased by the destruction of Saudi-Muwahhidun power, was nevertheless made anxious by the extension of Muhammad Ali's influence into Arabia. This in turn provided an avenue for Egypt's ally, France to enter the strategically important Persian Gulf. French warships harassed British merchant vessels and French agents were active in fomenting anti-British sentiment among the local chiefs.<sup>80</sup>

British interests in the Gulf were motivated by the desire to defend shipping routes to her colonial prize—India. The period 1793-1810 saw considerable disruption to trade and supply routes due to French attacks as well as local raiders ~~known as~~<sup>from</sup> the Qawasim. However, Britain did not wish to commit large naval forces to the role of policeman in the Gulf. Instead, Britain sought to employ local rulers for the task. A flurry of treaties were signed with Arab Sheikhs beginning with Bahrain in 1820.<sup>81</sup> In return for subsidies and protection, the Arab rulers had to take on a British agent and

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<sup>79</sup> Arnold T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, pp.198-199. Also Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part. 1, Vol. II p. 1090.

<sup>80</sup> The French landed in Egypt in 1798 and Napoleon was anxious to build up France's presence in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Captain G. Sadlier was sent by the Government of India to investigate Egyptian-French threats to British interests in the Persian Gulf. His trip was the first documented crossing of the Arabian Peninsula from east to west. See Sadlier *Diary of a Journey Across Arabia*.

<sup>81</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I Vol. I, pp. 658-677; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.15. and McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.10.

support the suppression of piracy against British ships. These provisions were later expanded to stipulate that the Sheikhs were not to accept subsidies from any other power nor lease land without British approval. This did not however end French involvement. The rule of Muhammad Ali in Egypt was a constant reminder of France's influence in the region.<sup>82</sup>

For all his French sympathies Muhammad Ali's chief concern was the expansion of his power, preferably at the expense of the Ottoman Sultan. He worked to create a highly centralised nominally independent state, taking advantage of Constantinople's weakened leadership. In fact his power was such that even the Ottoman Sultan was seeking his assistance. Sultan Mahmud<sup>II</sup> had reluctantly asked for help to suppress a rebellion in Greece that Ottoman soldiers had been unable to quell. Egyptian forces not only succeeded but advanced to take Athens.<sup>83</sup> In the Hijaz, three hundred members of the Sharifian family, from among whom the Sharif of Mecca was traditionally selected, were exiled to Egypt. Muhammad Ali appointed a Sharif of his own choice with a stipend and limited authority thus making the position little more than that of an Egyptian civil servant.

### The Second House of Al-Saud

Najd became the focus of renewed activity among the Saudi-Wahhabi families but from a different branch. Until that time the Saudi *amirs* were descendants of Abdul Aziz ibn Muhammad Al-Saud, the eldest son of the founder. With much of that branch exiled by Muhammad Ali to Egypt there was an opportunity for others in the extended family to come forward and take a leadership position. This was seized upon in 1824 by Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Saud.<sup>84</sup> Turki was also a grandson

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<sup>82</sup> War Office report of January 21, 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B270/P337 ; Hogarth, *A History of Arabia*, p.110.

<sup>83</sup> Muhammad Ali also sent several armies southwards into the Sudan, see Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol. 2, pp. 204-210.

<sup>84</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part.I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, pp.1093-1094. Also *Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 31, 1955, Vol.1 p. 155.



of the founder but from the line of the second son, (this was the same Abdullah ibn Muhammad who had made an unsuccessful attempt to challenge Abdullah ibn Saud for control in 1814).

Throughout the decade of 1824–1834, Turki concentrated on building his power base around Riyadh using familiar tactics of rallying tribal support and conquering territory. With support from the *ulema* of Riyadh and from the family of the 'Al-AlSheikh' (known as the family of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab), Turki was able to extend his influence into much of central Arabia. Yet he was careful to avoid direct confrontations with Egyptian and Ottoman forces as well as the Sheikhs on the Gulf coast with whom Britain had interests.<sup>85</sup> However, he was clever enough to negotiate with the Sheikhs of Bahrain and Qatar to pay tribute in order for them to be free from Muwahhidun raids.

By 1834, as had occurred in the past, dissension and rivalry within the extended family threatened the dynasty. This time the instigator was Mishari ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Saud, a cousin from the Abdul Aziz line of previous *amirs* who sought to claim power for himself. His method was simple and daring. He followed Turki out of the mosque after prayers and killed him. Proceeding to the houses of the Al-Sheikh family he obtained *bai'a* from them after promising that their lives would be spared.<sup>86</sup> Mishari was in power for just a few weeks before the son of the murdered *amir* returned to Riyadh. Faisal ibn Turki had been on a campaign at the time of his father's assassination and had come for revenge. He refused to accept the murderer of his father as the *amir*. Faisal rallied his men to storm his father's former fortress that Mishari had taken over. During the night raid one of Faisal's trusted Lieutenants, Abdullah ibn Al-Rashid, managed to break into Mishari's bedroom and avenged the death of the late *amir* Turki.

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<sup>85</sup> Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 337-339. See also undated India Office report entitled 'Note on Central Arabia' IOR L/P&S/18/B334; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan*, pp.13-17.

<sup>86</sup> Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p.114; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part.I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII p.1094; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan*, Part II, pp.38-39.

Forever grateful for this service Faisal appointed Abdullah Al-Rashid governor for life of Hail a town in northwest Najd.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile such disruption and instability in Riyadh prompted the *amirs* of Bahrain and Qatar to renounce their fealty to the Al-Saud. Other tribes, notably the Banu Khalid of al-Hasa also saw their chance to rebel. Though Faisal secured a second reign for the Abdul Aziz line, Saudi territory had significantly shrunk in size. Again inter-family rivalry and loss of tribal support had plagued the stability of the Saudi-Muwahhiddun entity. In a move that was designed to fortify his position in northwestern Najd, Faisal appointed Abdullah ibn Ali Al-Rashid as governor of the Hail region. At the time it was a shrewd move but the appointment was to haunt successive Saudi *amirs* into the twentieth century as the Al-Rashid became fierce rivals, launching a dynasty of their own and seeking to dispel the Al-Saud altogether from the Arabian peninsula.<sup>88</sup>

Observing the renewed activity in Najd and the return of the Al-Saud, Muhammad Ali in Egypt became concerned at new threats to his prize of Hijaz. He reached into his pool of captives from the 1818 assault on Diriyya to find a young Saudi who could lead an assault on Najd. The Egyptian ruler selected Khalid ibn Saud from the Abdul Aziz line for the task. Khalid was the youngest brother of the very same Abdullah who had surrendered at Diriyya and had then been executed in Constantinople. Khalid was a small boy at the time of his capture and was raised and educated in Egypt at Muhammad Ali's instruction.<sup>89</sup> Having grown into a young man he was to be used to divide loyalties in Najd and become the instrument to prevent a Saudi-Muwahiddun bid to establish a 'second kingdom'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Abdullah was also provided with men and supplies to make Hail his capital. This generous reward was to cast a long shadow as the Al-Rashid emerged as a rival dynasty that would haunt all Saudi *amirs* until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' Art. XVIII, p. 339.

<sup>88</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, p.105

<sup>89</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, p. 1104; Didier, *Sojourn With the Sharif*, p.108.

<sup>90</sup> Wahba, *Arabian Days*, pp.113-115.



Provided with Egyptian arms, soldiers and joined by beduin seeking to ingratiate themselves with Egypt, Khalid dutifully marched on Riyadh. Learning of the advancing army Faisal attempted to ambush the force but faced mass desertions after his men heard reports about the size of Egyptian units.<sup>91</sup> It was not only the size but experience of the officers that helped Khalid make rapid progress into Arabia. By the end of 1838, Khalid had achieved his goal and sent the captured Faisal and sons into exile in Cairo.<sup>92</sup>

### Ottoman-Egyptian Rivalry <sup>93</sup>

Flushed with victories in the Sudan, Greece and Arabia, Muhammad Ali sought more glory. His greatest desire was to possess Syria and he expected that he would receive it as his reward for aiding his Ottoman superior in the suppression of the Greek rebellion.<sup>94</sup> Sultan Mahmud II however, concerned at Ali's ambitions for power, refused to award Syria to him. In 1832 Muhammad Ali resolved to take Syria by force and amassed his troops for an invasion. With his eldest son Ibrahim in command the forces stormed into Syria, routing the Ottoman army. The vicious attack prompted the Sultan to declare war on the occupiers and launched Ottoman ground and naval units against Egyptian forces in Syria.

Ibrahim however, managed to fight, as well as bribe, Ottoman forces into defeat. The Ottoman naval commander simply sailed his fleet into Alexandria harbour and surrendered to Muhammad Ali.<sup>95</sup> For the following eight years Syria remained under Egyptian authority.

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<sup>91</sup> 'Note on Central Arabia' India Office Report (no date) IOR L/P&S/18/B334 ; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan*, Part II, p.70. Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, p. 1097

<sup>92</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.118-120 ; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan*, Part II, p.81-83; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the history of Ottoman-Egyptian relations or the details of Muhammad Ali's downfall. A useful source for this is Daly's, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol.2, especially pp. 165-179.

<sup>94</sup> Syria would provide extra manpower for his armies and was also a rich source of wood which was in short supply in Egypt. Ibid., p.166.

<sup>95</sup> Muhammad Ali successfully bribed the Ottoman grand admiral Ahmad Fawzi. Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol.2. p.172. See also Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, p.58.

Meanwhile Muhammad Ali's rebellious but successful campaigns were seen by European powers as a danger to the integrity of the Ottoman empire and a threat to colonial territories. Egypt already had strongholds along the Red Sea and a presence in central Arabia which pressured the British route to India. Fearing that Russia might take advantage of Ottoman-Egyptian tension to make territorial acquisitions of its own Britain and France came to the aid of the Ottoman Caliph. The Prime Minister of Britain, Henry Palmerston, lobbied the major powers of Europe, principally Austria, Prussia, and France to demand that Muhammad Ali leave Syria and return the Ottoman fleet to Mahmud.<sup>96</sup>

Muhammad Ali, however, flatly refused. Britain resolved to employ force and sent in her navy to shell Beirut and land troops in the city. Muhammad Ali's son Ibrahim led a force to push back the invaders but was defeated and subsequently fled to Egypt. Facing direct confrontation with Britain, Muhammad Ali succumbed to European demands. Egypt returned to being a province of the Ottoman Empire. Muhammad Ali's acquisitions in Syria, Greece (Crete), and Hijaz were revoked and were once again made Ottoman territories.<sup>97</sup> The famed Egyptian army was ordered reduced in size. Total numbers for all armed forces were capped at eighteen thousand, down from an all time high of over two hundred thousand.<sup>98</sup> Egypt and Muhammad Ali became a shadow of their former selves.

This had substantial repercussions for Najd and Khalid Al-Saud's Egyptian proxy rule. By late 1841 most of Muhammad Ali's troops had pulled out, leaving Khalid with only a small force. To compound matters Khalid had not been very successful in winning the hearts or the respect of people, or the *ulema*. His mannerisms, habits, even language had Egyptian

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<sup>96</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.270-279.

<sup>97</sup> The Ottoman Sultan issued an order on June 21 1841 which declared that Muhammad Ali would be ruler of Egypt for life but that his armies be reduced in size and that Egypt was bound to the same treaties with foreign powers as the Ottoman state. Daly, *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, Vol.2.

<sup>98</sup> 'Note on Central Arabia' India Office Report (no date) IOR L/P&S/18/B334.



and European influences which alienated him from the society around him. He had relied greatly on Egyptian soldiers and beduin mercenaries to maintain his position. With the loss of his Egyptian benefactor, it was not long before a distant family member challenged him for leadership.

Abdullah ibn Thunayyan was the son of Thunayyan ibn Saud, the younger brother of the dynastic founder. Thunayyan had been a notable opponent of the alliance with ibn Abdul Wahhab and his descendants had not previously enjoyed any share in ruling. Gaining the backing of local notables and from among the ulema Abdullah was able to force Khalid to step down. For the greater part of the next two years Abdullah ibn Thunayyan managed affairs of Riyadh but faced constant harassment from the deposed Khalid who remained in the vicinity of Najd and kept scheming to regain his lost influence.<sup>99</sup>

#### The Return of Faisal ibn Turki

The years 1814-1843 marked a period of intense inter-family rivalry, external threats and a reduction in Saudi territory.<sup>100</sup> An effective Saudi *amir* required two elements to maintain his rule. First, the diplomatic skills to manage tribal chiefs and keep good relations with other *amirs* both large and small. Many battlefield and territorial losses could have been prevented if beduin tribes had not defected to the other side. Successful campaigns against larger Egyptian or Ottoman forces were usually those that employed hit and run tactics. Successful Saudi *amirs* such as Saud ibn Abdul Aziz (1803-1814) had been victorious because they rarely made direct assaults on the better-equipped forces of their enemies. Second, the *amir* required a personality that was firm but also forgiving and generous. He had to appeal to the *ulema* but face down any relative or tribal chief that

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<sup>99</sup> While on a visit to Jeddah in 1854 the French traveller Charles Didier met with the deposed Khalid who had decamped to the less restrictive atmosphere of the Hijaz. The former amir regaled the Frenchman with stories of Muwahhidun politics in the stormy 1830's and 40's. Despite his loss of prestige Khalid apparently bore no personal animosity towards Faisal or other family members. Didier, *Sojourn with the Sharif*, p.108.

<sup>100</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia, in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 65; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan* part II, pp.11-17; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part.I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, pp.1096-1098.

might seek to challenge him. Even without the interference of Ottoman and Egyptian powers that was a delicate task.

It was not until 1843 that a period of relative stability began in Najd. In that year Faisal ibn Turki, who had been exiled to Cairo in 1838, managed to escape from Egypt and return to Najd.<sup>101</sup> Abdullah ibn Thunayyan knew that he did not have the popularity of Faisal, who was an already distinguished and well respected leader. Thunayyan stepped aside. Faisal established a new fortress in Riyadh and built a large mosque in the city. The second reign of Faisal was marked by the apparent realization that Saudi power could not be unilaterally projected and sustained throughout Arabia. In accepting the *realpolitik* of his situation Faisal kept his distance from British interests on the coast and from Ottomans in Hijaz, tempering the zeal which characterized early Saudi-Muwahhidun conquests. Although Faisal ensured the spread of the teachings of Sheikh ibn Abdul Wahhab, he did not force beduin in all areas to conform to the religious doctrine. Any challenges to his political authority however, were ruthlessly suppressed. Relations with important families were strengthened by the marriage of Faisal's sons into the Al-Rashid family and the Ajman tribe. In dealing with rulers of Qatar and Bahrain his appointed agents were drawn from local families to reduce antagonisms. As long as payment of tribute was made to Faisal, acknowledging his authority, local chiefs were left more or less alone. Thus a combination of shrewd diplomacy and forceful personality allowed Faisal to maintain stability and control of Najd from 1843 till his death in 1865.<sup>102</sup>

The period after Faisal's death was to become reminiscent of the family feuds of the past with quarrelling and constantly changing *amirs*.

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<sup>101</sup> Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 335-339. Also Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part.I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, p.1107.

<sup>102</sup> 'Note on Central Arabia' India Office Report (no date) IOR L/P&S/18/B334. *Memorial of the Government of Saudi Arabia*, Jeddah: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 31, 1955, Vol. I, p. 191



Fathering four sons (Abdullah, Sa'oud,<sup>103</sup> Muhammad and Abdul Rahman), there were several possible successors. They were all from different mothers and tension between them was often high. Although Abdullah was the eldest and had been nominated as successor he still felt threatened. In order to secure his position he placed men loyal to him in positions of power around the court. This came at the expense of his younger brothers who had aspirations of their own. Fearing that Abdullah's appointees would conspire to rob him of his chance to rule the third brother, Sa'oud, plotted to take over. With support from the Ajman tribe, from which both his wife and mother originated, Sa'oud seized power from Abdullah in 1871. The family was split by the conflict and internal divisions ensued. Muhammad rallied to Abdullah's side but was quickly arrested by Sa'oud. Finally, a paternal uncle, Abdullah ibn Turki, who did not accept the coup, used tribal and family alliances of his own to force Sa'oud out.<sup>104</sup> For a two-year period Abdullah ibn Turki ruled with the help of his nephew and former *amir*, Abdullah ibn Faisal.

However, Sa'oud retaliated in 1873, mustering support to regain power. He placed his uncle Abdullah ibn Turki in prison, where he died soon after, while his brothers Abdullah and Muhammad escaped capture. The youngest brother Abdul Rahman was not viewed as a threat and was allowed to stay close to Sa'oud in Riyadh. Yet Sa'oud himself fell victim to small-pox and died in 1875. For Abdul Rahman, in his twenties, and the only other brother in the city at the time, this meant he would become the new *amir*. However, upon hearing the news of Sa'oud's death, Abdullah and Muhammad made their way back to Riyadh where they confronted

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<sup>103</sup>Though this name can also be spelled 'Saud', to avoid confusion with the family name 'Al-Saud' and other relatives of the same name I have adopted this spelling to distinguish this individual.

<sup>104</sup> For details of family dynamics see Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, pp. 1121, 1128-1130. Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.226 and Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.229-261.

Abdul Rahman. Exerting pressure on their youngest sibling they encouraged him to step down in favour of Abdullah.<sup>105</sup>

While the brothers were still debating who should rule, their nephews, the sons of Sa'oud, had organized a force of their own. They hoped to save Riyadh from their bickering uncles by taking the city themselves. However, this threat seems to have motivated the uncles to settle their differences. Abdul Rahman, who had just become a proud father of new-born son, Abdul Aziz, ceded his place to the elder Abdullah. The nephews, though frustrated, did not give up hope of returning the dynasty to their family line.

### Hail Eclipses Riyadh

In Hail, Muhammad ibn Abdullah Al-Rashid, the son of the governor appointed by Faisal, took advantage of the quarrelling among the Al-Saud to broaden his own power base. During the late 1870's and early 80's he led an active campaign to spread his rule, which notably included taking over central Arabian towns in al-Qassim and forming alliances with eastern sections of the Harb and Mutayr tribes.<sup>106</sup> This enabled Al-Rashid to control the trade routes coming out of the Hijaz towards Najd and Kuwait. Not only did the Al-Saud suffer a drop in trade but they no longer received tribute payments from the towns of al-Qassim or Hail.<sup>107</sup> Abdullah and his brothers made several attempts to recapture territory without success. However, the Al-Saud had lost their fortune and had been overshadowed by the Al-Rashid. The ruler of Hail did however, spare Riyadh the humiliation of being sacked and allowed Abdullah to remain in power. He did not actively seek the removal of the Al-Saud from authority, being content with their subservience.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, London: Frank Cass, 1987, p.18 ; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, pp. 1133-1134.

<sup>106</sup> War Office Report, January 21, 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B270/P337.

<sup>107</sup> Hogarth, *A History of Arabia*, p.115.

<sup>108</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, pp. 1136-1137.



Yet in 1887 the infamous nephews, (the 'sons of Sa'oud'), made a second attempt to take Riyadh. This time, they were successful in taking their uncle Abdallah prisoner. Concerned about the stability of Riyadh, Al-Rashid ended his 'hands off' approach, sending in a large force to re-take the city and to free Abdullah. However, fed up with the weakness of Saudi rule Muhammad ibn Al-Rashid placed his own man, Salim ibn Subhan, as *amir* of Riyadh. Abdullah Al-Saud was 'invited' to Hail as a 'special guest'.<sup>109</sup> The *ulema* of Riyadh acknowledged the new Rashidi *amir* and pledged their fealty. Salim ibn Subhan meanwhile, decided to pursue the 'sons of Sa'oud' on his own initiative. This resulted in further battles in which two of the sons were killed. The third sought refuge in Hail and begged for clemency. Muhammad ibn Al-Rashid granted the request and was displeased with Subhan's unauthorised pursuit and dismissed him. Abdullah ibn Faisal was then allowed to return as *amir* under Rashidi suzerainty.

When Abdullah died in 1899 his youngest brother Abdul Rahman returned to power. For the next two years relations between Riyadh and Hail were strained due to various attempts by Abdul Rahman to break away. At first this was met with patience and diplomacy by Al-Rashid. However, when tribes in al-Qassim sought to take advantage of the soft line Hail seemed to be employing with Riyadh they rebelled themselves. Soon Abdul Rahman threw in his lot with them. With this mass show of rebellion Al-Rashid's patience evaporated and he moved to crush forcibly the renegades. Both sides faced each other at the battle of Mulaida in 1891 but the rebellious tribes were decisively defeated. Riyadh returned to the firm grasp of Hail and the *ulema* quickly reaffirmed their allegiance to Muhammad ibn Al-Rashid.<sup>110</sup> Abdul Rahman went into exile in the desert. He took with him his young son Abdul Aziz, while sending the rest of the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. This essentially meant that Abdullah was under house arrest and though provided with food and shelter, was constantly under watch. Also Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.270-271.

<sup>110</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.272-273.

family to Bahrain where they were welcomed into the house of the ruling *amir*.

Throughout these fluctuations in leadership the *ulema* of Najd played a background role politically, in that they did not espouse leadership for themselves. However, they did influence the contests for leadership by endorsing the rule of the victorious *amir*—in principle to prevent bloodshed and *fitnah*. To prevent *fitnah* was one of the cardinal concepts of Muwahhidun belief and a pillar of Ibn Taymiya's argument on political leadership; the individual leader was less important than maintaining civil order and Islam as the faith of the nation.<sup>111</sup> In the Quran, *fitnah* is described as "worse than killing" and this motivated the *ulema* to find quick solutions to prevent its occurrence.<sup>112</sup> Concern over igniting *fitnah* was the justification used by the *ulema* in Najd to accept whichever ruler took power because to resist could cause bloodshed and loss of life and property. Even though many of the prominent members were from the family of ibn Abdul Wahhab and married into the Al-Saud they too considered it better to accept a ruler, even an oppressive one, so long as he enforced Islamic law. Thus as Riyadh passed through the hands of the Saudi, Egyptian, and Rashidi powers the *ulema* pledged allegiance to whoever was the victor at the time.<sup>113</sup>

Since principles of governance were the same no matter who ruled, the fight was over which individual had the opportunity to implement them. Thus the religious order remained stable but the political one fluctuated. With the defeat at Mulaida the political order of Najd had changed hands once again.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibn Taymiya, *al-Hisba fi al-Islam*.

<sup>112</sup> John Williams on 'Fitnah' in *Oxford Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, pp.26-28. Also the Quran chapter 2, verses 191 and 217.

<sup>113</sup> Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp.80-81

<sup>114</sup> Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapter VIII, p. 1144.



## Chapter 2

### Exile in Kuwait

Mubarak Al-Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait, served as mentor, guide and political instructor to the young Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. The contribution of the Kuwaiti ruler to the development of Saudi political strategy is extremely significant.<sup>1</sup>

Humbled and defeated at the battle of Mulaidah, the Al-Saud were forced out of Riyadh. There were few tribes prepared to risk the wrath of the Al-Rashid by offering them protection. Initially, the Al-Saud found shelter in Al-Qassim, the tribal home of the Ajman. But there was a price on the head of Abdul Rahman, and no guarantees that an enterprising tribesman, would not turn him in. Arrangements were made for the family members of the Al-Saud to go to Bahrain while Abdul Rahman entered the vast central Arabian desert known as the Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter).<sup>2</sup> Far from the reaches of the Al-Rashid and the Ottomans, he was able to hide in the company of the Al-Murrah tribe. Sheltered from the outside world by their desert domain the Al-Murrah still lived a primitive existence. Barely clothed, unkempt and dishevelled in appearance they lived a basic existence, surviving on a diet of dates and camel's milk.<sup>3</sup> However, the Al-Murrah had a reputation as fierce raiders and were notorious for racing out of the desert to attack caravans before swiftly retreating into the dunes. Few dared to venture after them.

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<sup>1</sup> For details of this period see Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, Part I, Vol.II, Chapter VIII, pp.1141-1145; H.C. Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia: Ibn Saud, Intimate Study of a King*, London: Arthur Baker, 1934; Ameen Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1928; Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; David Howarth, *The Desert King: A Life of Ibn Saud*, London: Collins, 1964; William Yale, *The Near East*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968; Daniel Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, London: Murray, 1957. Also Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, and Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*.

<sup>2</sup> Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud* p.40. Van Der Meulen was the Dutch Consul in Jeddah and had studied Arabic and Islam under the famous Professor Snouck Hurgronje at Leiden. Also Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia*, p.29.

<sup>3</sup> The Al-Murrah were fiercely independent tribe and only some sections of it had any contact with the Muwahhidun movement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, see Rehatsek, 'The History of the Wahhabys in Arabia and India' pp. 274-401.

In contrast to the scarcity of the Empty Quarter, the women and children of the Al-Saud family enjoyed the comfort and protection of the ruling family of Bahrain. It was there that Abdul Aziz, the young son of Abdul Rahman became very ill. Diagnosed with rheumatic fever the boy was treated by doctors from the medical mission of the Dutch Reformed Church of America. This early exposure to modern medicine instilled a lifelong reliance and trust in physicians in the future King.<sup>4</sup> Upon recovery from his bout of fever Abdul Aziz joined his father with the Al-Murrah and spent two years living the carefree life of a beduin boy, learning the skills of the desert; tracking, horsemanship, swordplay, gaining knowledge of plant and wildlife.<sup>5</sup> His time spent in the desert would provide him with insight into the customs and lifestyle of the desert peoples. For his father however, it was not the life for a boy from a respectable religious family. Proper study of Islamic texts was necessary, but there were no such opportunities with the family split and living in exile.

It came as a welcome relief when in 1893 the ruler of Kuwait, Muhammad Al-Sabah, extended an invitation to the family. With the promise of safety (*aman*) and a monthly stipend Abdul Rahman and his family could once again be united.<sup>6</sup> Summoning the women and children from Bahrain, they settled down for almost a decade-long stay. Abdul Aziz was suddenly thrust into the exotic mix of cultures and distractions of a busy commercial city. In the 1890's Kuwait was a key port in the Gulf, where caravans from central Arabia and Iraq came to trade with ships from across the world. Coffee, tea, rice, guns and pearls were bought and sold. There were "merchants from Bombay and Teheran, Indians, Persians,

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<sup>4</sup>In fact in his later years as King, Abdul Aziz would frequently request Western medical attention for his ailments. Van Der Meulen, *Ibn Saud*, pp.40-41.

<sup>5</sup>Dates for Abdul Aziz's birth vary between 1876 and 1880. See Leslie McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom*, London:Macmillan, 1993, p.14; Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia*, p.29.

<sup>6</sup>The stipend was actually provided by the Ottoman Porte. From 1893 till 1904 Abdul Rahman received a monthly stipend of 58 Turkish Liras. It was part of a policy designed to keep Arab various leaders 'in play' and allowed the Porte to use one chief against the other when it suited Ottoman politics. See report by the British Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, March 27 1905, *FCO Confidential Print: Affairs of Arabia*, PRO FO 406/21 F8482/R87/I.



Syrians from Aleppo and Damascus, Armenians, Turks and Jews, traders from all the east".<sup>7</sup> Streets full of sailors and travellers exchanging news of far away cities and events; a sensuous atmosphere unlike the rough barrenness of the Empty Quarter. As a father, Abdul Rahman was certainly concerned about his son becoming enamoured by the distractions of the city and so a tutor was summoned from al-Qassim to provide Abdul Aziz with the proper instruction in the principles of faith and teachings of Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab.

In addition to this classical religious education Abdul Aziz benefited from a budding friendship with Mubarak Al-Sabah, the younger brother of the Kuwaiti ruler. Although much older, Mubarak took a liking to the teenager and spent much time mentoring Abdul Aziz.<sup>8</sup> Later, when Mubarak himself became ruler, Abdul Aziz was a frequent guest at the royal court and able to witness political and diplomatic intrigue first hand. It was Mubarak who provided the young boy with his first introduction to British power in the Gulf and who introduced him to visiting officials from His Majesty's Government. Attired in their dress uniforms, adorned with medals, colourful sashes and polished swords, British officers were a feast for the eyes of a boy from the desert. As Harry Philby remarked:

It was undoubtedly at this period that the young Abdul Aziz developed a boyish admiration for British imperialism which accompanied him through life, modified only by the proviso that it should not impinge upon his own sphere of activity.<sup>9</sup>

However, at the time Abdul Rahman moved to Kuwait, tensions were high within the ruling Al-Sabah family. The *amir*, Sheikh Muhammad, and his brother Jarrah were in disagreement with their ambitious younger sibling Mubarak. Besides personality clashes, tight controls had been placed on Mubarak's expenditures which fuelled tensions further.<sup>10</sup> One of the issues

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<sup>7</sup>Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Van der Meulen, *Wells of Ibn Saud*, p.44

<sup>9</sup> H. Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, London: Hale, 1952, p.6

<sup>10</sup> As a young man Mubarak's rebelliousness caused him to be sent off to Bombay where he incensed his brothers further by squandering his funds in gambling and other indulgences, Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia*, pp.40-43

upon which the brothers disagreed was the relationship with the Ottoman Porte. Mubarak opposed his brothers pro-Ottoman sympathies, believing instead that Kuwait should strive for greater independence.<sup>11</sup> He admired the arrangements of the Trucial States that had treaties with Britain providing them with assistance, supplies and protection. The treaties also guaranteed that Ottoman interference was kept to a minimum. Sheikh Muhammad, however, had no desire to change the status quo and was unhappy with Mubarak's interference. Hoping to keep him distracted elsewhere Mubarak was dispatched to deal with a rebellion of tribesmen in the south. However, to the disappointment of his elder siblings, Mubarak returned victorious and even more determined to make his mark on the future of Kuwait.

On the night of May 17, 1896, as Sheikh Muhammad slept, Mubarak led a small band of men onto the rooftop of his brother's house. Sneaking into the master bedroom Mubarak shot his brother in the head at point blank range. At another house nearby Mubarak's other brother Jarrah met the same fate. The next morning stunned family members learned of the deaths when they found Mubarak presiding over the royal court. He had *ipso facto* become the new Shaikh of Kuwait.<sup>12</sup>

To pre-empt any moves against him he pledged allegiance to the Porte and kept the Ottoman flag flying at the palace.<sup>13</sup> Then using the wealth of his late brother, Mubarak attempted to bribe Ottoman officials to recognise him as the lawful ruler of Kuwait. However, this was not

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<sup>11</sup> Salwa Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah: Shaikh of Kuwait, 1896-1915*, London: I.B.Tauris, 1998. See especially chapter 1 for detail on inter-family rivalry of the Al-Sabah. Also Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, pp. 136-137 and Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: the Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp.93-94.

<sup>12</sup> British Embassy, Constantinople to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (hereafter SSFA) July 6 1896, PRO FO 406/14 F7380/E1/R1/I.

<sup>13</sup> Soon after taking over, Mubarak's nephews (sons of the murdered Muhammad) made an unsuccessful attempt to retake the city with the help of their maternal uncle Sheikh Yusuf Ibrahim of Durra. Then Saood, another son, approached the British Consul at Basra and sought assistance in retaking Kuwait in return for loyalty to HM Government. See Secretary of State for India (hereafter SSFI) Hamilton to Government of India, July 23, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E1/R14/I.





straightforward as the *vali* of Basra, Hamdi Pasha was insulted by the offer of 10,000 Lira and was in fact more in favour of bringing Kuwait under direct Ottoman control.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, he preferred that the Porte recognise one of the surviving sons of the murdered Muhammad Al-Sabah. Through strategic donations of cash and gifts to advisors at the court in Constantinople, Mubarak was able to prevail. Not only was Hamdi Pasha instructed to extend all courtesy to Mubarak as the new *kaimakam* District Governor (administrator) of Kuwait but Hamdi himself was later transferred from his post. If this bold move surprised the young Abdul Aziz it was only to be the beginning of a long tutorial for the future head of the Al-Saud.

#### Taking Advantage of Anglo-Ottoman Rivalry

Mubarak was a shrewd ruler and knew that he would have to proceed cautiously. Although he had obtained Ottoman patronage, Mubarak kept this secret and looked for additional sources of support. In September 1897 he appealed to the British to grant him protection on the same terms as Sheikhs of the Trucial coast because of his concerns that the Ottoman Empire would absorb Kuwait. In return, he offered to assist Britain in keeping the peace in the Gulf.<sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Colonel M.J. Meade, the British Resident in the Gulf, was intrigued by this request and believed there would be benefits in responding favourably: "Koweit posses an excellent harbour, and will, under our protection undoubtedly become one of the most important places in the Persian Gulf".<sup>16</sup>

However, Meade's superiors were reluctant to proceed and chose not to respond to Kuwaiti overtures. Mubarak persisted and on November 6, 1897, while meeting with Commander Moubray of the British warship *Pigeon* he reiterated the request for British protection. Mubarak cited

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<sup>14</sup> Memo Captain J.F. Whyte to British Consul, Basra, March 22 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E1/R3/I.

<sup>15</sup> India Office to Foreign Office , April 7 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/R5/I, See also Government of India to SSFI, September 19, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E1/R6/I.

<sup>16</sup> M.J. Meade, Resident, Gulf to Government of India, September 25, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E4/R23/I.

correspondence from his ally Sheikh Issa of Bahrain who had extolled the virtues of British rule. When the Commander inquired as to whether in fact the amir was not already under Turkish protection Mubarak vehemently denied the allegation, and on the contrary, told the Commander that he sought to "throw off all [the] Turkish yoke".<sup>17</sup>

Although Britain did not recognise Kuwait as an integral part of the Ottoman empire, she acknowledged Ottoman influence in the country.<sup>18</sup> Mubarak was seen as an Ottoman subject and the Government of India "did not propose to interfere in the affairs of that Chiefship more than may be necessary for the maintenance of the general peace of the Persian Gulf".<sup>19</sup> The Foreign Office concurred with this view and no further action was taken.<sup>20</sup>

About this time reports were circulating of Russian designs on Kuwait and that Moscow was anxious to set up a coaling station in the territory.<sup>21</sup> This new Russian interest led to a flurry of correspondence between the Secretary of State for India and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. While there was uncertainty as to the seriousness of the Russian move, neither the Foreign Office nor the India Office was sure how to proceed. However, the Admiralty believed that the Russian threat should be taken seriously: "If however, Russia ever descends through Persia to establish herself on the shores of the Gulf, Koweit would be the natural port for any ships which she might get into the Gulf."<sup>22</sup>

In the opinion of the Resident, M.J. Meade, closer British ties with Kuwait were extremely desirable. Not only would that allow Mubarak to play an important role in the fight against piracy and the slave trade but

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<sup>17</sup> Lt. Commander Moubray to Resident, Gulf, November 7, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E2/R26/I. See also B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press 1967, p.102.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of State for India (SSFI) Hamilton to Government of India, July 23, 1897, FO 406/14, F7380/E1/R14/I.

<sup>19</sup> India Office to Foreign Office, September 28, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/R16/I.

<sup>20</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, November 28, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/R24/I.

<sup>21</sup> British Consul General, Baghdad to Government of India, December 22, 1897, FO 406/14 F7380/E2/R27/I



would prevent other powers from establishing a much coveted foothold: "Even if we are not immediately interested in getting hold of Koweit for ourselves we cannot afford to let it fall into the hands of any other power".<sup>23</sup>

The Foreign Office was unable to establish clear policy guidelines on the matter and left the decision to the Government of India. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was willing to support a proposal to make Kuwait a British protectorate, but only if the Viceroy felt it was desirable.<sup>24</sup> In fact the Government of India was becoming increasingly nervous about other European powers entering Kuwait. Germany, Russia and France were all seeking footholds in the strategic Gulf region—a prospect that cast a shadow on the vital link to India.<sup>25</sup> Fearing further encroachment of these powers the Viceroy changed tack and authorised negotiations with Kuwait.<sup>26</sup> Provided that Mubarak did not cede, lease, or mortgage any of his territories to any foreign government or subjects of a foreign power without prior British consent, the Viceroy was ready to finalise a treaty.

The task of negotiating the treaty with Mubarak was given to the Resident, M.J. Meade. Although Meade was authorised to offer a monthly subsidy in order to sweeten the deal it was clear that Mubarak was not interested in British money. Instead he wanted guarantees that Britain would protect his personal real estate holdings inside Ottoman territory. The Al-Sabah family owned sizeable portions of land and lucrative date farms near Basra, but under Ottoman law, only citizens of the Porte could own property. If a treaty was signed with Britain, Mubarak risked losing his Ottoman citizenship. His family property could be forfeited and considerable annual income would be lost. Mubarak also wanted written assurances that Britain would come to his aid if any military action was

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<sup>22</sup> Admiral Beaumont, Admiralty to Foreign Office , February 18, 1898, FO 406/14 F7380/R32/I.

<sup>23</sup> Colonel M.J. Meade, Resident, Gulf to FCO, March 28, 1898, FO 406/14, F7380/R33/I.

<sup>24</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, December 5, 1898, FO 406/14 F7380/R36/I.

<sup>25</sup> Electric telegraph lines ran overland through Iran and Iraq to India. See McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.17 and Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.35.

taken on his land by Ottoman forces. In fact, Mubarak's other brothers, Hamud and Jabir, declared that their acceptance of a British treaty was conditional upon such assurances.

However, Colonel Meade had no authority to grant such assurances and after being pressed, declared that he would have to leave Kuwait to seek further instruction from his superiors and then return at some later date to finalise the agreement.<sup>27</sup> Mubarak did not wish to risk losing the opportunity to have a treaty in hand and agreed to drop the issue. His brothers objected, preferring to wait until Britain made promises in writing. Mubarak overruled them and signed the treaty with Britain on January 23, 1899. One of the most important clauses was that the treaty remain a secret.<sup>28</sup> Though identical to those established with other Trucial states the treaty with Kuwait had one important exception—a clause that prohibited Mubarak from accepting representatives of foreign powers without prior British consent. The Indian Government or the Foreign Office had not included this new stipulation. It was added by the British Resident himself and was, as will be discussed later, to have a lasting impact on future events.<sup>29</sup>

When Lord Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India became aware of the provisions of the treaty he protested to the Government of India that the Resident in the Gulf “was not authorised” to include the prohibition on foreign representatives.<sup>30</sup> Such a clause might be used to deny Ottoman officials entry into Kuwait which could adversely affect Anglo-Ottoman relations. Defending his actions, Meade stated that Mubarak himself had requested the clause to prevent the representatives of other powers from

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<sup>26</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, January 4, 1899, FO 406/14, F7380/R40/I.

<sup>27</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India, January 30, 1899, FO 406/14 F7380/E2/R71/I.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the treaty dated 23 January 1899, can be found in India Office to Foreign Office, March 14, 1899, FO 406/14, F7380/E3/R71/I.

<sup>29</sup> Some authors have incorrectly argued that the clause was deliberately added by the British to prohibit Ottoman officials from Kuwait, however the Secretary of State for India was anxious that this not even appear to be the case. See David Finnie, *Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq*, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992 p.16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Secretary of State, India to Government of India, March 30, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R81/I.



taking up residence in Kuwait.<sup>31</sup> Although still unhappy at the inclusion of the clause, the Secretary of State was nevertheless, resigned to leaving it in place. Hamilton had also been concerned that Mubarak should not become emboldened by his treaty with Britain and engage in further intrigue to Kuwait's advantage.

Hamilton was not pleased when his suspicions turned out to be true. Mubarak did indeed exhibit greater confidence after signing the treaty. He leaked news of his new relationship with Britain and was confident enough to raise import taxes on goods of Turkish origin.<sup>32</sup> Ottoman officials were immediately suspicious of British intentions in Kuwait.<sup>33</sup> It had not been possible to keep secret the fact that Mubarak had received the British Resident at court. Meade himself had to grudgingly report that "the Turks appear to have some knowledge of our recent negotiations with the Sheikh of Koweit".<sup>34</sup> In fact when Meade learned that reinforcements had been sent to the garrison in Basra, it seemed to suggest a military strike was being contemplated. Meade suggested diplomatic approaches be quickly made to resolve the issue of Kuwait. Otherwise, if Turkish forces were mobilised to attack it would be difficult to prevent their movement without a direct confrontation and would likely escalate Ottoman intrigue in the area:

Our interests in the Persian Gulf however, make it well nigh impossible that we should allow Turkey or any other Power, or its subjects, to obtain a foothold at Koweit, which may become the eastern terminus of a railway on the shortest route to India. Its natural advantages and good harbour are all such that it will affect us seriously if it ever passes into

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<sup>31</sup> Resident, Gulf (Meade) to Government of India, May 21 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E2/R93/I.

<sup>32</sup> Mubarak levied a 5% import tax on all imports which was a clear challenge to Ottoman sovereignty. British Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, May 3, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E2/R86/I.

<sup>33</sup> What they did not know was that the Admiralty had been given orders to "forbid and prevent any armed attack which may be made upon Kuwait by the Turkish authorities." FO to Admiralty, February 6 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R47/I.

<sup>34</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India, April 30, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/E1/R85/I.

other hands, and we should be prepared to sacrifice much before we relinquish our interest in the place.<sup>35</sup>

However, the situation was already escalating. The British Consul at Basra, A.C. Wratismaw, alerted the Foreign Office to the seriousness of Ottoman concerns by reporting that Mubarak's old nemesis, Hamdi Pasha, had been reinstated as *vali* of Basra. This return meant that the estranged nephews (sons of the brothers murdered by Mubarak) would have the political support they needed to make claims on Kuwaiti leadership.<sup>36</sup> They would be more amenable to Ottoman control and could be used by Hamdi to provide the necessary pretext for military action.<sup>37</sup> The Imperial court was already suspicious of British support for Mubarak. The situation was not helped by Mubarak's brazen imposition of taxes or his boasting. It had only been through lavish bribery that Mubarak had been able to defeat Hamdi's last attempt to invade and annexe Kuwait into the Basra *vilayet*. The British Ambassador, Nicholas O'Connor agreed that it would be prudent to warn the Porte against any military action in Kuwait.<sup>38</sup> However, it was equally, if not more, important for Mubarak to be told to "be more cautious in his action and language".<sup>39</sup>

Consensus had developed in the field and within certain quarters in London on the need to be forthright about British interests in Kuwait. The

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<sup>35</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India, May 7 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E3/R91/I. In fact there was some disagreement between British officials in the Gulf. The Consul, Basra, asserted that Mubarak had been appointed by the Porte as the *kaimakam* (District Governor) of Najd, while the Political Resident (Meade) had no idea Mubarak had taken a Turkish title. In fact the Resident did not believe the Consul's assertion. Meade's own man had spoken to Mubarak and asked if the Sheikh had taken an Ottoman title. Mubarak told him that he had not and so Meade felt reassured that the Sheikh had been honest with him. In fact Mubarak had indeed taken the title and the Consul's information was correct. Nevertheless, this shows the lack of information sharing and the occasional friction among British officials vying to be the first to report accurate information back to their respective superiors. See also Resident, Gulf to Consul Basra, May 30 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E2/R96/I. ; Consul, Basra to Resident, Gulf June 2 1899, FO 406/14:F7380/E3/R96/I.

<sup>36</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, April 22, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E1/R83/I.

<sup>37</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India, May 7, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E3/R91/I.

<sup>38</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA May 24 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R83/I also Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, June 6 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R86/I.



Resident in the Gulf, the Ambassador in Constantinople, the Consul in Basra, the India Office and the Government of India were all in agreement on this issue.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it was a decision for Lord Salisbury, (the Prime Minister and Secretary of State) and he had no desire to risk creating a potentially tense situation that could result from a direct warning to the Porte. Instead Salisbury favoured a more circuitous route and instructions were issued to the Consul in Basra that Hamdi Pasha be told in effect that an attack upon Kuwait would 'get him into trouble', knowing that the message would reach Constantinople soon enough.<sup>41</sup> The Consul was also to send Mubarak a strong message urging caution in his actions and language. The Government of India was also instructed to make sure that Mubarak received a similar message from the Resident in the Gulf.<sup>42</sup>

In Constantinople, Ambassador O'Connor anticipated that he would be called in to explain British policy after the Porte received reports from Hamdi Pasha. O'Connor believed that by reassuring the Sultan that Britain's only interest was in protecting her commercial and political interests in the gulf, and by avoiding any definite statements about Kuwaiti independence, the issue could be resolved satisfactorily.<sup>43</sup> Upon becoming aware of this the India Office immediately rejected this proposal. It felt strongly that the January 1899 agreement was based on the premise that Kuwait was independent. There should be no encouragement of the view that Turkey had any territorial rights over Kuwait.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Government of India did not want to be in a situation where their ability to respond to an appeal for help (which Mubarak was entitled to do under the terms of the agreement) was compromised. As a result O'Connor was instructed to

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<sup>39</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to Prime Minister (Marquis of Salisbury), June 6 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R86/I.

<sup>40</sup> Government of India to SSFI (Hamilton), June 1 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/E1/R91/I ; also India Office to Foreign Office, June 7 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R85/I.

<sup>41</sup> Salisbury wanted the consul in Basra to inform Hamdi Pasha of the unpleasantness that would result from an Ottoman attack on Kuwait. Prime Minister (Marquis of Salisbury) to Ambassador, Constantinople, June 17, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R88/I.

<sup>42</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, June 18, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R89/I.

<sup>43</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to PM/SSFA, July 5, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/R95/I.

<sup>44</sup> India Office to Foreign Office, July 18, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R100/I.

restrict his remarks to the Porte to keep in line with the points raised by the India Office.<sup>45</sup>

The potential for a rapid escalation of hostilities between the Porte and Kuwait raised British concerns about the lengthy communications procedures that were utilised by representatives of the Foreign Office and the Government of India. The time it took for information exchange was hazardous in the dynamic situation in the region at the time. For example, if the Consul in Basra had vital information for the attention of the Political Resident in the Gulf, he would first send it to the Ambassador in Constantinople who would pass it to the Foreign Office in London, which would then send it to the India Office (also in London and housed in the same building). It would then be sent to the Government of India, which would have it finally dispatched to the Resident in the Gulf. It could take weeks for a simple cable to travel through all these departments.

By mutual consent the two branches agreed that the Consul in Basra should directly communicate with the Resident on any matter of importance regarding Kuwait. If the situation developed seriously enough the Consul was even authorised to communicate directly with the Government of India.<sup>46</sup> In turn the Resident was instructed to keep the Consul at Basra up to date on developments in the area.<sup>47</sup> This was an unusual breaking of the traditional chain of command but it is indicative of the growing tensions within the branches of Government.

Meanwhile, Ottoman officials were increasingly disconcerted over the intimate relations Britain seemed to be forming with Kuwait and by Mubarak's increasingly bold manner. In an effort to exert greater control the Porte attempted to dispatch a customs inspector and harbour master to Kuwait.<sup>48</sup> However, Mubarak refused to accept the officials and had them forcibly expelled. The Ottoman garrison commander in Basra was incensed

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<sup>45</sup> SSFA to Ambassador, Constantinople, July 25, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/R103/I.

<sup>46</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, August 30, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/R106/I.

<sup>47</sup> India Office to Foreign Office September 2, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R108/I.

<sup>48</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, September 6, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/R109/I.



and ready to launch a military expedition against Kuwait to punish Mubarak for his defiance.<sup>49</sup> As reports filtered back to London the previously cautious attitude of the Prime Minister quickly changed. Within hours of receiving the news of the incident he instructed Ambassador O'Connor to be direct with the Porte:

You should lose no time in warning the Turkish Government that Her Majesty's Government, while having themselves no design on Koweit, have friendly relations with the Sheikh of that place. Further, that a very inconvenient and disagreeable question would be realised if an attempt were made to establish Turkish authority or customs control at Koweit without previous agreement with Her Majesty's Government.<sup>50</sup>

Orders were also immediately given to the Admiralty for a British warship to be despatched to Kuwait with specific instructions to protect Mubarak from any Ottoman attack.<sup>51</sup>

The Porte attempted to show its displeasure with Britain and it took O'Connor a few days before he was granted an audience with the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Tewfik Pasha. The British Ambassador was not put off by his hosts. He had the advantage of knowing the extent of Turkish overtures to Kuwait since Mubarak had proudly shown the British Resident all the correspondence he received from the Porte.<sup>52</sup> O'Connor was direct and to the point. He warned Tewfik Pasha that Britain had a preponderant interest in Kuwait and did not approve of the Porte imposing their officials

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<sup>49</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, September 8, 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R111/I.

<sup>50</sup> Prime Minister (Marquis of Salisbury) to Ambassador, Constantinople, September 8, 1899 FO 406/14: F7380/R112/I.

<sup>51</sup> Foreign Office to Admiralty, September 9, 1899, FO 406/14 F7380/R113/I. The Admiralty dispatched the *Sphinx*. This decision was communicated to the India Office which told the Government of India which in turn informed the Resident, Gulf in the Gulf. However, no word was given to the Consul in Basra. The Consul discovered the Ship's mission by chance. He received a private letter from the Captain of the *Sphinx* who happened to be a friend. The Captain had written to say that he had suddenly been ordered to Kuwait to prevent an attack by the Turks. The Consul was surprised that the Foreign Office had taken such action. He saw no reason for alarm since the Turks could not launch an invasion of Kuwait overnight. Moreover such an invasion "could hardly be organised with such secrecy that no news would reach this Consulate", Consul Basra, to Ambassador, Constantinople September 16, 1899, FO 406/14 F7380/E2/R130/I.



upon the Sheikh.<sup>53</sup> Nor would Her Majesty's Government stand idly if any attempts were made to impose further changes to the status quo. The Porte would "do well not to raise a question now about Kuwait".<sup>54</sup>

To the ambassador's surprise the Foreign Minister completely backed down, became deferential and apologetic. Tewfik explained that there had been a misunderstanding and that there had been no intention of establishing a harbour master or launching a military attack on Kuwait. It had been the Naval Commander of Basra who had acted of his own device and without instructions from Constantinople.<sup>55</sup> Almost immediately, the tension diffused. Ultimately Mubarak came out the victor. He had achieved direct and overt support from Britain and by virtue of his secret treaty, Kuwait was protected from Ottoman reprisals.

### Early Forays into Najd

Historically, Kuwait was secure so long as the tribes of the interior were busy fighting amongst themselves and no unified group emerged that was able to threaten the small coastal principality. Assured that British power was behind him, Mubarak gained the confidence he needed to expand his reach into Najd and the Arabian interior.<sup>56</sup> He was particularly concerned with the northeastern city of Hail, the power base of the Al-Rashid. The House of Al-Rashid had granted refuge to his disgruntled nephews and enjoyed support from Constantinople as well as the allegiance of numerous tribes.<sup>57</sup> Mubarak had previously been reluctant to engage them fully but they could launch an assault on him at any time. However, in 1897 the charismatic and powerful head of the family, Muhammad ibn Al-Rashid

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<sup>52</sup>Mubarak Al-Sabah to Resident, Gulf, January 13, 1900, (translated from Arabic) FO 406/15 F7495/E4/R16/II.

<sup>53</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA September 13 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R120/I.

<sup>54</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA September 15 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R123/I. Queen Victoria reigned for sixty three years until her death on January 22, 1901. She died at eighty-one years of age and was succeeded by King Edward VII.

<sup>55</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA September 13 1899, FO 406/14: F7380/R120/I.

<sup>56</sup> Madawi al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*, London: I.B. Taurus 1991, p.61.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmad Abu-Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait: 1750-1965*, London: Luzac&Co. 1983, p.113; Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.237,



died. The ensuing power struggle divided the family and created chaos in Hail.

Mubarak saw an opportunity to strike and chose to place at the head of his campaign Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal Al-Saud. Goldberg argues that Mubarak was seeking to divert the attention of the Al-Rashid away from Kuwait by "lending his support to the plans of the Al-Saud".<sup>58</sup> However, it is more likely that the situation was in fact the opposite — with Mubarak the one who used the Al-Saud for his own purposes. British reports at the time indicate that Abdul Rahman Al-Saud had "few, if any, men of his own" and relied greatly for men and supplies on Mubarak Al-Sabah.<sup>59</sup> The Kuwaiti ruler was proving to be a shrewd student of the art of desert politics and warfare. Although the young Abdul Aziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud is not specifically mentioned, it is more than likely that he took part with his father in some of these raids. This early period would have provided him with the necessary skills that he would use later in his own struggle for Riyadh.

By the summer of 1900, Mubarak had arranged for Abdul Rahman to be joined by Shakh Sa'dun of the Muntafik tribe (who was also an enemy of the Al-Rashid). With men, money and supplies from Kuwait they undertook small scale raids on caravans and tribes loyal to the Al-Rashid. British officials in the Gulf initially treated this insignificant and inevitable tribal raiding. However, in early October 1900 the force made a particularly successful raid on Hail, coming away with booty and animals before retreating back to Kuwait. Forces loyal to the Al-Rashid engaged in pursuit of the raiders. News of a Rashidi force heading for Kuwait made British officials nervous and fearful of a major clash.<sup>60</sup> A proposal to send a gunboat was considered, but the Government of India was anxious for more details before making such a show of force. Colonel Kemball, the

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<sup>58</sup> Jacob Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: 1902-1918*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p.42

<sup>59</sup> Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, December 28, 1900, FO F7742/R5/I/III, p.4.

<sup>60</sup> Secretary, Embassy Constantinople to SSFA/PM (Salisbury), October 3, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/R53/II

Political Resident in the Gulf was ordered to proceed to Kuwait and establish the likelihood of hostilities breaking out.<sup>61</sup>

Kemball arrived in Kuwait on October 20 and learned that Mubarak was still in the interior, at least a day's journey from the city. Nevertheless, he interviewed Mubarak's eldest son, Jabir to ascertain the cause of recent events. Kemball reported that the Rashidi attack was indeed provoked by the Kuwaiti backed raid on Hail. Yet he condoned the Kuwaiti attack as an act of self-defence. Mubarak was justified in his actions because he was simply trying to weaken the authority of his bitter rivals the Al-Rashid. More interesting though is Kemball's assertion that it was the Al-Saud who approached Kuwait for assistance in regaining Riyadh from the Al-Rashid and that Abdul Rahman Al-Saud was the chief instigator of the whole affair.<sup>62</sup>

No doubt this was the view that the Kuwaiti ruler wanted the British to take. Kemball's information was based on the accounts of Mubarak loyalists. In essence responsibility for the conflict was placed on the Al-Saud with Mubarak simply taking advantage of their desire to eliminate the threat of Hail. Mubarak was painted as the noble ruler coming to the assistance of another respected family chief for the honourable task of regaining their family seat.

In any case, the Government of India was more interested in Kemball's security assessment which was dismissive of any serious threats to the area as a result of recent activities. He was confident that Mubarak would not "proceed to extremes" or prompt unwanted interference from the Porte:

So far as Kuwait is concerned, he is (Mubarak) probably well able to hold his own, and he is not likely to take any steps which would bring himself into difficulties with Turkey.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Government of India to SSFI (Hamilton) October 8, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R55/II

<sup>62</sup> Resident, Gulf (Kemball) to Government of India, November 3, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E3/R90/II.

<sup>63</sup> Resident, Gulf (Kemball) to Government of India, October 30, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E2/R91/II.



India was reassured that the Al-Rashid were already weakened and that there was little chance of an attack on Kuwait. Since Mubarak had not asked for help, he must have been confident of his position. The Resident advised that it was not necessary to have a gunboat sent to the area and felt it might actually be counterproductive—giving a larger than necessary boost to Mubarak's ego.

The India Office in London however, was not so optimistic. Reports had been received that the Al-Rashid were still bent on exacting revenge and that their forces had reached Basra. There they pressed the vali of Basra for several demands—that Mubarak make financial restitution for the raids, give an apology and recognise that the Al-Rashid, were the rightful rulers of Najd—otherwise Kuwait would be attacked.<sup>64</sup> It would seem that none of the reassurances of Kemball's report calmed fears. However, it seems likely that his report had not been received at that time. Even though Kemball had sent his report on November 3 to the Government of India, the India Office in London did not seem to know about it. On November 12, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Hamilton, cabled the Government of India with a short three line telegram:

Reported from Bussorah [Basra] that Amir of Najd [Ibn Rashid] demands from Turks satisfaction against Koweit, failing which he will attack. Has Kemball yet reported to you on position there? What are the facts as to the quarrel between the Amir and Sheikh [Mubarak]?.<sup>65</sup>

Hamilton was anxious to take action but did not seem to have much information to go on. Nor could the Government of India provide much solace. Its reply was even shorter and stated simply that no action had been

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<sup>64</sup> Admiralty to Foreign Office November 10, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R62/II and Consul, Basra to Secretary, Embassy Constantinople, November 13, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R74/II.

<sup>65</sup> SSFI (Hamilton) to Government of India, November 12, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E2/R63/II

taken on the assumption that London would provide instructions if necessary.<sup>66</sup>

With no concrete information about the events in Kuwait, Hamilton feared the worst. He requested the Foreign Office to immediately dispatch a British Agent on a warship to Kuwait to warn Ibn Rashid against making any attempts. If an attack did take place Hamilton ordered the invaders to be expelled. Mubarak was to be given shelter aboard the British warship until it was safe to return.<sup>67</sup> Following this request the Foreign Office replied within hours, but felt it necessary to temper the exuberance of the Indian branch of the service. There would be a huge political fall out if British warships opened fire on subjects of the Ottoman empire (i.e. the Al-Rashid), more so if British troops landed at Kuwait. Therefore, while the Foreign Office authorised a ship to take an Agent to Kuwait (which would again be Kemball) to examine the situation it did not give permission for any active measures to be taken nor for the expulsion of any invaders.<sup>68</sup>

While London had been groping to come up with a policy to deal with events in Kuwait, the Porte had already decided on action. Three battalions of Turkish troops were sent to the Basra area to prevent hostilities from breaking out. The *vali* was instructed to resolve the dispute as he saw fit.<sup>69</sup> By this time Hamdi Pasha was no longer *vali* of Basra and his successor, Muhsin Pasha moved quickly. Emissaries were dispatched to Ibn Rashid and Mubarak with orders for them to desist. Ibn Rashid was urged to return to Hail and allow the Porte to deal with the Sheikh of Kuwait.<sup>70</sup> While Al-Rashid was ready to comply, Mubarak tried to ignore attempts to restrain him. He rode out to meet Ibn Rashid in the north and

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<sup>66</sup> Government of India to SSFI, November 12, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R63/II. Later, the Viceroy would learn that the Al-Saud had been the cause of the incident, see Viceroy to SSFI, November 19, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R75/II

<sup>67</sup> India Office to Foreign Office November 14, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R63/II

<sup>68</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, November 14, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R65/II. Kemball himself had been opposed to sending a warship. See Resident, Gulf (Kemball) to Government of India November 3, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E3/R90/II.

<sup>69</sup> Consul, Basra to Secretary, Embassy Constantinople, November 13 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R74/II.



avoided the emissary sent by Muhsin. However, when he reached near the town of Zubair the emissary caught up and pressured him to retreat. Mubarak was caught—he could not refuse a direct request by the *vali* and so he agreed to travel to Basra where a meeting had been arranged with Muhsin Pasha. The exact nature of the discussions is not clear but British sources suggest that Mubarak protested his innocence and blamed Abdul Rahman Al-Saud as the cause for the fallout with Ibn Rashid. Mubarak also managed to ingratiate himself with the new *vali* through gifts and largesse. The Porte was soothed with pledges of loyalty and by the construction in Kuwait of a mosque in the name of the Sultan.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, on November 16, Kemball reported that the “Arab crises is passed; both sides are on their way home”.<sup>72</sup> He was relieved and assumed it no longer necessary for him to return to Kuwait. However, the India Office still wanted him to go and meet with Mubarak. Kemball protested that such a visit might complicate matters by causing Mubarak to believe that he would be protected from trouble by the British and so embolden his actions. It was only then that the India Office backed down.<sup>73</sup> The Resident reassured India that Mubarak had great survival skills. The fact that Mubarak had developed a rapport with the vali of Basra meant he was likely to receive favourable treatment in case of further clashes with Hail. Meanwhile the Al-Rashid would probably be discouraged from attempting further attacks on Kuwait.

It was recognised however, that Mubarak would continue his support for the Saudi raids on Hail while disclaiming any involvement: “That Mubarak is a clever and ambitious man there can be no doubt...and he has no intention of coming to any amicable arrangement with the Amir

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<sup>70</sup> Report of events of November 1900 in Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, November 22, 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/R92/II

<sup>71</sup> Secretary, Embassy Constantinople to SSFA/PM (Salisbury) November 12, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R73/II. Also Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, November 22, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R92/II.

<sup>72</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India November 17 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E5/R90/II.

<sup>73</sup> India Office to Foreign Office November 21, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E1/R87/II.; and Government of India to SSFI, November 26 1900, FO 406/15 F7495/E2/R87/II.

of Najd".<sup>74</sup> In fact Kemball was quite concerned with the attitude of the Sheikh. He feared that Mubarak had already become too confident of British support and was losing a healthy fear of Ottoman reprisals. Kemball would warn Mubarak against provoking the Porte by encouraging raids on Hail: "It seems to me that you are pursuing a dangerous policy by continuing to provoke the Amir of Nejd, and again I counsel you to keep quiet".<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the Consul at Basra believed that Mubarak appeared to have lost the initiative and could expect Ibn Rashid to try once again to settle scores. The Consul was more uneasy with what appeared to be a Turkish victory:

Mubarak has been to much expense and trouble in organising an equipping a large army, and yet, at the bidding of the Vali, he has to return to Koweit without striking a blow. By his visit here he has once more allowed the Turks to assert their suzerainty over Koweit, which indeed, in his correspondence with the Valis and the Sultan since his accession to the Sheikhship, he has constantly admitted.<sup>76</sup>

While the focus of these events was on Mubarak Al-Sabah it is important to point out the other important historical actor that emerged from this period. Up until this time there was little interest in the Al-Saud. For the first time in the twentieth century the Al-Saud begin to appear in British reports.<sup>77</sup> As a result of British concern over a possible Kuwaiti-Ottoman conflict, officials in London and India begin to discuss their family name, their history and supposed ambitions and would soon come to view them as the most significant power in Arabia.

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<sup>74</sup> Resident, Gulf (Kemball) to Government of India December 3, 1901, FO 78/5173 F7742/E3/R6/III.

<sup>75</sup> Resident, Gulf to Mubarak Al-Sabah December 10, 1901, FO 78/5173/7742/E3/R9/III

<sup>76</sup> Report of Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, November 22, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R92/II.

<sup>77</sup> Resident, Gulf (Kemball) to Government of India November 3 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/E3/R90/II. And Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, November 22, 1900 FO 406/15 F7495/R92/II.



### Proxy War in Arabia: Mubarak and the Capture of Najd

Mubarak Al-Sabah did not heed the advice of the British Resident and on December 18, 1900, he moved northwest out of Kuwait. Meeting up with Abdul Rahman Al-Saud and other tribal supporters, preparations were made for fresh campaigns against Hail.<sup>78</sup> Taking time to rally tribes and gather provisions Mubarak's forces swelled to several thousand. In January 1901 the force moved their camp inside Najdi territory.<sup>79</sup> Mubarak and Abdul Rahman met with the chiefs of the Anayza and Qassimi tribes. Selling them on tales of victory and booty they pledged *bai'a* and joined the party.<sup>80</sup> With a stroke Mubarak had gained control of a large part of Najd with the exception of Riyadh.

He made no attempt to take the city himself but in a calculated move dispatched his Saudi allies to do the job. While Abdul Rahman stayed with the main party, his son, Abdul Aziz went to Riyadh and invoked the claim to leadership based on their family heritage.<sup>81</sup> The townspeople, however, saw him and his soldiers as agents of Mubarak Al-Sabah and had no desire to become vassals of the Kuwaitis. Moreover, they were fearful of reprisals from the Al-Rashid to whom the *ba'ia* (pledge of loyalty) had already been given. Although the Rashidi governor was hiding in the city's fortress it was only a matter of time before reinforcements came from Hail. The situation in Riyadh quickly turned into a stalemate. Abdul Aziz was left with a tenuous hold on the city. This fact did not stop Mubarak from claiming victory. Indeed, he boasted that

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<sup>78</sup> Consul, Basra to Embassy, Constantinople, December 28, 1900 FO 78/ 5173 F7742/R5/III

<sup>79</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, February 16, 1901, FO 78/ 5173 F7742/E1/R14/III, p.15. Also India Office Report, 'Note on Central Arabia', n.d., IOR L/P&S/18/B334. See also Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.238-239.

<sup>80</sup> Secret Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, February 19, 1901, FO 78/5173 F7742/E3/R41/III, pp.27-28.

<sup>81</sup> This account from Najdi oral history was given by Dr. A.A Masri, Professor, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, during a lecture held at King's College, University of London, 14 March 1995. Reference to this incident can also be found in Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia* p,26.

all the people of Najd had willingly offered their fealty to him and that he had appointed Abdul Rahman as governor of Riyadh.<sup>82</sup>

On February 27, 1901, after having staked his claim to Najd, Mubarak mobilised his forces for the four hundred-mile journey to the Rashidi capital of Hail. Great efforts were made to win over tribes allied to Ibn Rashid. Initially this was quite successful, and the force managed to cross most of central Arabia with little opposition. It was only when they came near to Jebel Shammar, that Ibn Rashid came out to intercept them. The two sides met on March 17, 1901 at Sarif near the town of Buraydah. Official reports for March and April indicate the uncertainty of British officials about the outcome of the battle. Rumours were rife of Mubarak's death but none of the British political officers in the Gulf had a clear picture of what had happened.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, British officials learned from a Turkish source that Mubarak was still alive and heading back to Kuwait.<sup>84</sup> Apparently, during the battle, some of the beduins in Mubarak's force deserted, leaving the Kuwaiti party outnumbered. Ibn Rashid captured the camels, supplies and ammunition of the Kuwaiti forces. Mubarak lost his brother, Hamoud and nephew Sabah in the battle and was forced to retreat.<sup>85</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Saud received word about the setback and realised that his hopes of holding Riyadh had evaporated. Departing the city at night, he fled to Kuwait.

The forays into central Arabia had been an unqualified disaster for Mubarak and the Al-Saud. Kuwait was now on the defensive. The furious Al-Rashid had declared that unless Mubarak was removed as ruler of

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<sup>82</sup> Mubarak Al-Sabah to Jabir ibn Mubarak (his son) February 25 1901, letter in Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, February 25, 1901, FO 78/ 5173 F7742/E4/R41/I/III, pp.28-29.

<sup>83</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople 29 March 1901, PRO FO 195/2096, p.65.

<sup>84</sup> The Vali at Basra sent his aide de camp to Kuwait to find out what happened and found Mubarak was alive and back home. See detailed report by Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, April 10, 1901, PRO FO 195/2096, p.110-115, also FO 78/ 5173 F7742/E1/R73/III. See also Dickson, *Kuwait and her Neighbours*, p. 137.

<sup>85</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, March 16, 1901, FO 78/5173 F7742/R36/I/III, p.53. Also Ambassador, Constantinople, March 29, 1901, Ibid, p. 64; SSFA to IO, March 30, 1901, Ibid, p.65.



Kuwait the city would be attacked.<sup>86</sup> Kuwait mobilised defences and Mubarak called on his British benefactors for supplies of arms and ammunition. The Foreign Office authorised the dispatch of British warships to Kuwait's defence. The Admiralty sent three ships, with one stationed right inside the Kuwait harbour as a clear sign of Britain's commitment to the ruler.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the situation had arisen out of Mubarak's confidence in British protection was not lost on British officials:

The Sheikh of Kuwait appears to be a ruler of considerable determination of character, wily and self seeking. He is probably emboldened by his Convention with the British Government to go farther than he otherwise would do and possibly counts upon His Majesty's Government saving him from the consequences of an unsuccessful attack upon his powerful neighbour Abdul Aziz (Ibn Rashid ) of Najd.<sup>88</sup>

By the time the forces of Ibn Rashid came to within a few miles of Kuwait, news had spread that the city was heavily defended by the *injleezi* (English).<sup>89</sup> Among the defenders was a small band of Saudi forces carrying green banners on which was inscribed the *shahadah* (the Islamic declaration of faith) marking their positions.<sup>90</sup> Avoiding an outright assault the Al-Rashid lay siege for a few weeks, during which time only a few hundred sheep were taken. With no substantial support from the Porte Ibn Rashid finally gave up and withdrew to Hail. It was clear that British support made all the difference. Mubarak's special relationship had put off the Ottomans and deterred Ibn Rashid. The drama was costly nevertheless for Mubarak. Although the Al-Rashid were thwarted, he had risked his position in Kuwait, and could have provided the Turks with the excuse they sought to invade.

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<sup>86</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, April 29, 1901, PRO FO 78/5173, #29, pp.154-155 F7742/R48/III, p.31.

<sup>87</sup> Foreign Office to Admiralty, March 30, 1901, FO 78/5173 F7742/R212/III, p. 68 .

<sup>88</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, April 10, 1901, Affairs of Kuwait: Political Department, FO 78/5173 #59, pp.42-49 F7742/R35/III.

<sup>89</sup> Foreign Office to Admiralty, April 29, 1901, FO 78/5173 #33, p.150, F7742/R51/I/III, p.32. Also Admiral Bosanquet to Admiralty, May 1, 1901, FO 78/5173 #300, p.170 F7742/E1/R55/I/III p.34. See also Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.41.

<sup>90</sup> This was later to become the national flag of Saudi Arabia

Still an ambitious man however, Mubarak now turned to his protégé to carry out a proxy war to eliminate the Rashidi menace and establish a Kuwaiti protectorate inland. Abdul Rahman who had thus far led Saudi forces, withdrew from active campaigning and allowed his son Abdul Aziz, to take command of the front line. With Mubarak's encouragement Abdul Aziz planned another attempt on Riyadh. With a force of around forty men, composed almost entirely of members of the Al-Saud clan, he set off in October 1901. Heading southwest from Kuwait he hoped to gather support from tribes along the way. Initially this was successful and numbers swelled to above sixty, but as the winter drew near, enthusiasm waned and numbers dropped.<sup>91</sup> Abdul Aziz took his remaining party into the isolation of the Empty Quarter to wait. They rested, prayed and fasted the month of Ramadan. By keeping out of sight Abdul Aziz sought to lull the Rashidi governor of Riyadh into a false sense of security. After two months in the desert they began their quest for the city. On 15 January 1902 the green banner was unfurled and Abdul Aziz made way for Riyadh. This time he wanted the people of Riyadh to know that he was coming in the name of Islam and to re-establish the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab.

An accurate account of how the city was taken is difficult to gather since Abdul Aziz himself told the story in many different ways, adding new parts and subtracting others when it suited him. Even Philby, in his biography *Saudi Arabia*, states that the details of the capture had "been told too often" to know what actually happened.<sup>92</sup> However there are some basic consistencies. This author found a report in the Foreign Office Confidential Print series detailing the capture of Riyadh which was written by the British Assistant Political Agent in Bahrain in February, 1902. This

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<sup>91</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.239. The amount of booty was relatively small. This and the cold winters caused many men to lose their enthusiasm and return to their tribes.

<sup>92</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.239.



account has been more or less reproduced by Philby and later chroniclers of the event.<sup>93</sup>

Ibn Saud is said to have set out with his band of men for the purpose of raiding the beduin of Najd. He did not declare his true intentions until he had reached the outskirts of Riyadh. There he announced his plan to take the city and to remove the Rashidi governor. Sending the main party to take shelter in a date grove near the city walls to avoid detection Ibn Saud took just eight of his most trusted men with him inside the city. It was a core group made up of two of his cousins, his brother Muhammad and loyal retainers.<sup>94</sup> The small group scaled the city walls and crept through the darkened streets until they came to the house of Amir Ajlan, the governor of the town. Bursting into the house Ibn Saud learned that Ajlan was not there and that he spent his nights in the palace fort. It would be at least an hour after daybreak before he returned. With tension mounting Ibn Saud summoned the rest of his party hiding in the date groves. The group waited in Ajlan's house nervously watching the door to the palace which was across the street. When the gates were opened to let the amir out, the attackers leapt out of hiding. Ajlan turned and ran for the safety of the palace but he was struck and killed as he tried to get through the door.<sup>95</sup> The raiders pressed on into the palace killing fourteen guards and officials of Ibn Rashid. After securing the area, Ibn Saud leapt to the parapet and announced to the people that he had re-conquered his country. He invited the notables to the palace where he lectured them on the misrule of ibn Rashid and on the leniency of the Al-Saud. He urged all those who professed to want peace to lay down their arms and submit.

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<sup>93</sup> Assistant Political Agent, Bahrain report 'Translated purport of an Account of the Capture of Riyadh by Shaikh Abdul-Aziz-bin-Shaikh Abdur Rahman-el-Faisal Al Saood' included in Resident, Gulf to Government of India, March 2, 1902, FO 406/16 F8218/E9/R122/IV. For accounts by contemporary authors see Lacey *The Kingdom*, pp.48-52; McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, pp.20-22; Yale, *The Near East*, pp. 257-260; Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.29-31

<sup>94</sup> His cousins were Abdullah ibn Jiluwi Al-Saud and Abdul Aziz ibn Musaid Al-Saud.

<sup>95</sup> Also see Dickson *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, pp. 138-139.

The *ulema* of Riyadh were hesitant to confer complete authority on the young untried Abdul Aziz. By virtue of his successful capture of the city they had to accept Abdul Aziz as the *amir* but they conferred upon his father, Abdul Rahman the title of *imam*.<sup>96</sup> Eager to cement his ties with the religious establishment Abdul Aziz married the daughter of the chief *qadi* (judge) Sheikh Abdullah ibn Abdul Lateef. From this point Abdul Aziz, having made a name for himself throughout central Arabia, was often referred to simply as 'Ibn Saud'.

The Al-Rashid despite frustration at the loss of Riyadh took time to assemble a force to counter attack. By the time they were ready to move on Riyadh the city was too heavily defended. Their attempts were met by hit and run manoeuvres, lightening raids and feint attacks, which were Ibn Saud's trade marks.<sup>97</sup> The success of these tactics frustrated Ibn Rashid and forced him to wait in vain for Constantinople to send assistance.

British officials first learned of the capture of Riyadh by the Al-Saud in a letter dated 20 Shawwal 1319 (30 January 1902) sent by Mubarak al-Sabah. The Resident in the Gulf was informed that the people of Najd were rallying round Abdul Aziz and that the fort of Riyadh had been captured.<sup>98</sup> The Kuwaiti amir led the Resident to believe that this was an entirely indigenous reaction and that Abdul Aziz had achieved victory through his own solitary efforts: "I do not think that he (Mubarak) is in any way responsible for the proceedings of Abdul Aziz".<sup>99</sup> The Resident was unsure of the new state of affairs in Najd but was doubtful about the longevity of the new Saudi regime: "Whether Abdul Aziz will be able to re-establish

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<sup>96</sup>India Office Report, 'Note on Central Arabia' IOR L/P&S/18/B334. Also Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.67. and Asad *The Road to Mecca.*, p.172-173. Goldrup's account (*Saudi Arabia* p.31) is slightly different. He cites Arabic sources as indicating that Abdul Rahman emphatically refused the title and threatened to leave Riyadh unless his son became amir. This version is quite typical of the exaggerated language style of some Arabic historical writers and this author is inclined to give greater weight to the other accounts.

<sup>97</sup> Dickson *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p. 139.

<sup>98</sup> Mubarak Al-Sabah to Resident, Gulf, 20 Shawwal 1319, enclosure in Resident, Gulf to Government of India, February 6 1902, Report 109, File 8218, Vol.II Part IV, p.62

<sup>99</sup> Resident, Gulf to Government of India, February 17, 1902, PRO FO 406/16 F8218/E1/R126/IV.



himself in the kingdom of his ancestors remains to be seen. His ultimate defeat by Ibn Rashid would seem to be probable."<sup>100</sup>

However, Mubarak had in fact set an excellent example on how to consolidate power and the new Saudi regime was soon to call upon Britain for support. In a letter to the Resident, Abdul Rahman requested that Britain treat him as a British protégé.<sup>101</sup> In return for financial support he offered to take the coastal region of al-Hasa away from Ottoman control.<sup>102</sup> The letter included a tacit threat to turn to Russia if no response was forthcoming.<sup>103</sup> The British Resident however, was reluctant to entertain the request. The Al-Saud had an uncertain and perhaps temporary hold on Riyadh. It was likely that Ibn Rashid would try to regain his lost territory and he was still considered the Amir of Najd. The Resident did not feel that such a request warranted a response. Kemball reported his doubts to the Government of India and they concurred: "The Government of India agree[s] with your view, that pending further developments, no encouragement should be given to Abdul-bin Feysal, and your action in abstaining from replying to his letter is approved."<sup>104</sup>

In keeping with Mubarak's strategy, the Al-Saud also sent pledges of loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan. But the Porte was now wary of possible Saudi designs on al-Hasa and dispatched a new governor along with reinforcements of 500 men and four large calibre mountain guns to the

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<sup>100</sup> Resident, Gulf, February 19, 1902, PRO FO 406/16, F8218/E1/R122/IV.

<sup>101</sup> Abdul Rahman bin Feysal al Saud to Resident, Gulf, 5<sup>th</sup> Safar 1320 (May 14 1902), PRO FO 406/16: F8218/E9/R164/IV.

<sup>102</sup> India Office Report, 'Note on Central Arabia' IOR L/P&S/18/B334. Russia had tried unsuccessfully in 1898 to establish a cooling station in Kuwait. Then in 1899 the Germans and the Ottomans made plans to make Kuwait the end station of the Baghdad railway line. These events made Britain concerned over the protection of Kuwait. See Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp.21-22.

<sup>103</sup> In December 1901 while Abdul Rahman was in Kuwait he was approached by the Russian Consul in Bushire who offered Russian assistance and protection in the fight to regain Najd but Mubarak encouraged Abdul Rahman not to take up this offer but instead to ask the British for protection. Report of Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf (Lt. Commander J.G. Armstrong) to Admiral Bosanquet, Admiralty, May 27 1902, PRO FO 406/16: F8218/E1/R159/IV.

<sup>104</sup> Government of India to Resident, Gulf, June 23 1902, FO 406/16: F8218/E10/R164/IV.

region.<sup>105</sup> In a gesture designed to keep Ibn Rashid in play, the Porte awarded him with medals for loyalty and devotion to the Sultan.<sup>106</sup>

By this time it seemed clear to British officials that in fact Mubarak was "notoriously aiding and abetting Ibn Saud, who could have done little without his help".<sup>107</sup> Abdul Aziz's successes in consolidating tribal support allowed him to take more towns and gain further pledges of support from local tribes. Through the summer of 1902 numerous skirmishes and raids took place with Ibn Rashid. There were small victories on both sides but Ibn Rashid also began to focus attacks on what he saw as the source of the Al-Saud's support—Kuwait. Tribes under Mubarak's protection were plundered as Ibn Rashid retaliated against the one he saw as the chief enemy. The Government of India became concerned that such hostilities would bring unwanted Ottoman intervention. The Secretary of State for India ordered that Mubarak should be warned "not to encourage any action likely to bring him into difficulties with Nejd (i.e. Ibn Rashid) or with Turkish authorities".<sup>108</sup> A warning was also issued to the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs, that HMG wanted to respect the status quo in Kuwait but would not stand by if she was attacked. The Minister was urged to have the Wali of Basra put a stop to Ibn Rashid's raids on Mubarak.<sup>109</sup>

From Mubarak's point of view, to cease aiding and abetting Ibn Saud would leave Ibn Rashid truly powerful and in a position to threaten Kuwait. He would manoeuvre around British objections and attempt to gain the most out of each foreign power. Mubarak ensured that he kept Abdul Aziz in play by introducing the young man to the Russian Consul and captain of the Russian ship *Boyarin*. Mubarak knew that the Consul

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<sup>105</sup> Consul, Basra to Agent, Embassy Constantinople, July 3, 1902, FO 406/16: F8218/E1/R170/IV p.105-106.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Rashid was granted the 'Order of Iftikhar'. See Agent, Embassy Constantinople to SSFA, July 16, 1902, FO 406/16: F8218/R157/IV p. 96.

<sup>107</sup> ConsI, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, July 31, 1902. FO 406/16:F8218/R174/IV.

<sup>108</sup> SSFI (Hamilton) to Government of India, September 22, 1902, FO 406/16:F8218/E1/R192/IV.

<sup>109</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, November 20, 1902, FO 406/16:F8218/R234/IV.



was keen on establishing patronage over an Arab sheikh.<sup>110</sup> He also arranged for the younger brother of Abdul Aziz, Muhammad Al-Saud to be sumptuously entertained by captain of the French cruiser *Infernet*. Subsequently, a meeting was arranged for Abdul Aziz with Commander Kemp of the British warship *Sphinx* on 8 March 1903 with Mubarak in attendance. It soon became clear what Mubarak had planned. A request was made for British support but Kemp was also told that the Russians had offered money and support for the fight against ibn Rashid. Perhaps as Mubarak expected, the British officer immediately tried to dissuade Abdul Aziz from taking up the Russian offer:

I pointed out to Abdul Aziz that it was undesirable that foreign European countries should interfere in the affairs of Najd, and suggested that he should refuse any offers made to him on behalf of the Russian Government, and that, as Great Britain was the predominant power in the Persian Gulf , and intended to remain so , it would not, in the end, pay him to do anything of which she disapproved.<sup>111</sup>

Playing along with the plan Abdul Aziz complained that his enemy Ibn Rashid was receiving support form the Ottoman authorities and that he too required financial support in order to maintain his forces. Commander Kemp was anxious to prevent another power from bidding for Arab loyalty but he could not offer any assurances except that he would forward the request to higher authorities.

In any case Abdul Aziz did not have much time in Kuwait to play political games with foreign powers. During his absence from Riyadh, Ibn Rashid launched an attack on the city. His father Abdul Rahman led a capable defence and the invaders were forced to retreat leaving their supplies and horses behind.<sup>112</sup> Abdul Aziz chased after the attackers and caught up with a band of ibn Rashid men, between al-Hasa and Kuwait to punish them for their assault. This was followed by a series of skirmishes

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<sup>110</sup> Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, March 8, 1903, FO 406/17: F8238/E3/R43/V.

<sup>111</sup> Commander Kemp, (*Sphinx*) to Admiral Drury, Admiralty, March 14, 1903, F8238/E1/R42/V.

throughout the spring and summer of 1903 between Saudi and Rashidi forces. In late July, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Nicolas O'Connor, learned that Mubarak was rallying Sheikhs of the Anayza tribe to join the Al-Saud in another attack on Ibn Rashid.<sup>113</sup> O'Connor knew that he could expect another round of protests from the Ottoman Foreign Minister. It was a constant and tiresome exercise to calm Ottoman fears and then defend Britain's position. Kuwaiti support for the Al-Saud was complicating relations with the Porte. Despite repeated claims that he was not involved, it was clear that Mubarak was funding the Al-Saud against Ibn Rashid. O'Connor wanted to reign in Mubarak's activities. He sent a request to the Foreign Office for a British Agent to be assigned to Kuwait to control Mubarak's ambitions.<sup>114</sup>

Although the Viceroy of India was supportive of the idea, the Government administration preferred to have the Consul at Mohammerah (on the Gulf) appointed responsible for Kuwait, but this was rejected by the Foreign Office.<sup>115</sup> As far as HMG was concerned Kuwait was officially part of the Ottoman empire. The subject of Kuwait's status as a semi-independent entity was never formally discussed. The Foreign Office had an understanding with the Porte. The appointment of an agent at Kuwait would be a departure from the status quo and the Foreign Office had no desire to go down that route.<sup>116</sup>

#### Britain and the Establishment of an Independent Saudi Entity

In January 1904, Ibn Rashid would try again to make a decisive move against his Saudi-Kuwaiti foes. He marched to the outskirts of Kuwait and asked the Porte for permission to enter because Mubarak had "given proof

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<sup>112</sup> Mubarak Al-Sabah to Resident, Gulf, April 14, 1903, F8238/E2/R51/V.

<sup>113</sup> These were Sheikhs who had taken refuge in Kuwait after being expelled by Ibn Rashid from their territory. Consul, Basra (Crow) to Ambassador, Constantinople, July 20, 1903, F8238/R69/V.

<sup>114</sup> Lord Hamilton to Government India, July 21, 1903, F8238/E1/R57/V.

<sup>115</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, August 13, 1903, F8238/R65/V. The Government of India suggested that in the short term the Consul-General at Bushire should be made responsible for frequent visits to Kuwait.

<sup>116</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, November 25, 1903 FO 406/17 F8238/R90/V



of his relations, with and subjection to, the English".<sup>117</sup> The authorisation was slow to arrive, in fact it never did, and the party from Hail turned back.<sup>118</sup> Ironically, while Ibn Rashid was waiting for his reply from Constantinople, the British Ambassador in that city had cabled the British Foreign Secretary to complain of the Sheikh's duplicity: "The Sheikh of Kuwait readily assures us that he is the warm partisan and faithful subject of His Majesty's Government, but he gives equal, if not more fervent, assurances to the Sultan in a contrary sense".<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile, Ibn Saud was preparing to move further into central Arabia. In March he entered al-Qassim and attacked a force of 400 strong Rashidi loyalists. One of Ibn Rashid's top lieutenants, Hussein Jarrad, was killed in the battle and over 150 camels and a money bag of 1000 silver riyals were captured.<sup>120</sup> Jarrad was a trusted leader who had been in charge of the defence of al-Qassim and his death was a severe blow to Al-Rashid. Ibn Saud now faced a much less well-led group. Emboldened by his success, he entered the town of Aneyza on March 22. The Rashidi appointed governor of the town was shot and killed and the houses of Rashidi loyalists plundered.<sup>121</sup> Thus, by the end of April, Ibn Saud had reached into central Arabia with Najd, al-Qassim and Aneyza under his control.

Although flushed with success Ibn Saud soon received reports of Ottoman reinforcements being massed near Sammawa.<sup>122</sup> The Porte had not given Ibn Rashid permission to attack Kuwait, which would bring conflict with Britain, but had instead sent forces to aid Ibn Rashid take back

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<sup>117</sup> Intercepted telegram from Ibn Rashid to Sultan dated January 4, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R14/VI.

<sup>118</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople, to SSFA, February 29, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R23/VI.

<sup>119</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, January 11, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R2/VI.

<sup>120</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, March 15, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R30/VI.

<sup>121</sup> Letter of Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud to Sheikh Mubarak al Sabah, 10th Muharram 1322 (27 March 1904) cited in Consul, Jeddah to Ambassador, Constantinople, April 22 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E3/R45/VI.

<sup>122</sup> Consul, Basra to Ambassador, Constantinople, April 27, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R51/VI.

central Arabia.<sup>123</sup> On May 2, 1904 Ibn Saud sent an urgent request for British protection.<sup>124</sup> However, within a week the contingent of Ottoman troops with heavy artillery was already on the move. The force consisted of eight regiments of soldiers (totalling some 2400 men), artillery, guns, and money.<sup>125</sup> They were joined by Ibn Rashid and tribal levies from the Harb, Utayba and Shammar. Ibn Saud was forced to meet the advancing army and a series of battles ensued in the area of Bukhayriya<sup>y</sup>, near the town of Buraydah.<sup>126</sup> †

Casualties were heavy on both sides but Ibn Saud suffered a serious personal wound during one of the battles. The heat and harsh desert environment also took its toll on Ottoman soldiers unaccustomed to such conditions. Many died of thirst and heat exhaustion. Reaching a stalemate both sides retired to rest and regroup. However, disagreements between Ibn Rashid and Ottoman officers on strategy and the lack of reinforcements further demoralised the Ottoman forces.

The British Foreign Office had been viewing these events with a mixture of alarm and confusion. There was no clear consensus on what could be done. An October 1901 agreement was in place with the Ottoman Government which was drawn up to prevent hostilities between Ibn Rashid and Sheikh of Kuwait but no stipulation had been made that either Government should intervene between Ibn Rashid and Ibn Saud. London felt that all that could be done was to instruct Mubarak not to get involved and to request the Porte also to not encourage anything that would exacerbate the "disturbed condition" of the area.<sup>127</sup> The British ambassador had been forced on a number of occasions to explain that HMG had tried to

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<sup>123</sup> Consul, Damascus to Ambassador, Constantinople, January 11 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/I.

<sup>124</sup> Ibn Saud to Resident, Gulf, May 2 1904, cited in Government India to SSFA, May 20 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R46/VI.

<sup>125</sup> See William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz Under Ottoman Control 1840-1908*, Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1984, p.204. Also Government India to SSFI, April 28, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R37/VI.

<sup>126</sup> Political Intelligence Report, Consul, Baghdad to Government of India, 26 December 1904, FO 406/20 F8472/E2/R55/I.

<sup>127</sup> SSFA to Ambassador, Constantinople, May 10, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R42/VI.



restrain Mubarak and had expected the Porte to do the same with Ibn Rashid.<sup>128</sup> But O'Connor could not insist that the Ottomans refrain from supporting Ibn Rashid without looking like a supporter of Ibn Saud. The frustration of the British ambassador can be seen in the tone of his correspondence:

It must be borne in mind that the Emir of Najd (Ibn Rashid) is the party attacked and I confess I cannot see with what arguments or on what grounds I can press the Ottoman Government from assisting him, without appearing to directly espouse the cause of Ibn Saud.<sup>129</sup>

There were certainly some in the Foreign Office that viewed the success of Ibn Saud as potentially harmful to British interests in Kuwait. A new Wahabbi dynasty in Arabia could threaten British influence which had, up till that time, been steadily growing year by year.<sup>130</sup> Yet this was not the view of the Government of India. The Viceroy, Lord Curzon believed that British influence over Mubarak had actually "increased concurrently with the success of his friend, Bin Saoud".<sup>131</sup> Curzon worried that if Mubarak was prevented from helping Ibn Saud it would allow the Turks to gain supremacy in Najd. Ultimately, this would weaken Mubarak's position and might even lead to an attack on Kuwait—which would bring Britain into direct conflict with the Ottoman Empire. That was more objectionable than the re-establishment of a Wahabbi dynasty, which was seen as less fanatical than territorial.<sup>132</sup> Lord Curzon was keen to revive the idea of an Agent at Kuwait so that Mubarak could be kept in line and to ensure that central Arabian politics did not spill into the Gulf.<sup>133</sup> Relations between the Government of India and the Foreign Office were becoming strained over this issue. But the Foreign Office reluctantly gave in and Curzon appointed Captain S.G. Knox as the first Political Agent in Kuwait. Shortly thereafter,

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<sup>128</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, May 16, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R49(No.373)/VI.

<sup>129</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, May 23, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/R49(No.93)/VI.

<sup>130</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to SSFA, May 16, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R49/VI.

<sup>131</sup> Viceroy of India to SSFA, May 29, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R54/VI.

<sup>132</sup> Viceroy of India to SSFA, May 29, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R54/VI.

Curzon selected Colonel Percy Cox to play the larger co-ordinating role of Political Resident in the Persian Gulf.<sup>134</sup>

Following the battles near Bukhayriya there was little appetite for conflict during the scorching summer months. However, by August, Ibn Rashid was bolstered by further supplies and men from the Ottoman garrison and was looking for another chance to challenge his foe. Although he began another round of attacks, the effectiveness of his forces were hampered by disagreements with the Turkish soldiers, low morale and a lack of unit cohesion. Ibn Rashid was also known to be abusive to his soldiers and was particularly harsh with the Turkish regulars.<sup>135</sup> Food and rations were withheld to ensure obedience. He sought glory but did not wish to use own men in the front lines. On many occasions, Ibn Rashid ordered the Ottoman soldiers to march in front of his beduin forces. Generally reluctant Turkish officers were forced to comply and in one instance when a Turkish captain refused to march his men in front, Ibn Rashid shot and killed him in anger.<sup>136</sup>

On the night of September 27, 1904, Ibn Rashid attacked the village of Shunayna near the oasis of Qasr ibn Uqayyil, where Ibn Saud was camped.<sup>137</sup> However, the Turkish soldiers reportedly fled the battle and Ibn Rashid retreated to chase after them. Ibn Saud pursued the party and completely routed the lot. Shunayna was a decisive battle. Among the Ottoman losses were two majors, six captains and four lieutenants as well

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<sup>133</sup>Viceroy of India, to SSFA, May 20 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R46/VI. See also Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, p.102.

<sup>134</sup> Foreign Office to India Office, July 23, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R73/VI. And Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.48.

<sup>135</sup> Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p.156.

<sup>136</sup> Ibn Rashid then ordered the second in command to march the Ottoman troops in front of the Beduin. During the battle many of these soldiers were killed by 'friendly fire'. See Resident in Turkish Arabia (Newmarch) to Ambassador, Constantinople, August 10, 1904, F8420/E1/R89/VI. The huge losses of ibn Rashid and the mass chaos of joint Rashid-Ottoman forces is detailed in the 10 August extract of the Diary of Political Resident of Turkish Arabia, 15 August 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R103/VI.

<sup>137</sup> Political Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, October 17, 1904 FO 406/19 F8503/E2/R2/VII. For further details on this battle see also Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 61; Goldberg, *Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia* p.59; Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*, pp.156-157.



as over a thousand soldiers.<sup>138</sup> The Ottoman authorities tried to hide their defeat by spreading false rumours of Ibn Saud's demise and Turkish victory.<sup>139</sup> Attempts to placate its soldiers were made by announcing that all those who fought in Arabia would get medals while the officers would be promoted. However, the Porte could not hide the fact that Ibn Rashid had himself contributed to his own failure and that Saudi prestige had increased. It became obvious to the Porte that Ibn Saud was on the rise and the downfall of Ibn Rashid was a matter of time. Ibn Saud was fortunate that a revolt in Yemen reduced Constantinople's appetite for long entanglements in Central Arabia.<sup>140</sup>

The vali of Basra sent a message to Mubarak that if Ibn Saud were to give his allegiance to the Porte he would be left alone to rule Najd without interference from Constantinople.<sup>141</sup> This overture alarmed the ruler of Kuwait. The establishment of direct political relations with Ibn Saud would allow the Porte to absorb Najd completely. Kuwait's position would then become precarious and her independence threatened.<sup>142</sup> Mubarak did not rush to inform Ibn Saud of this opportunity but rather conveyed his concerns to the newly appointed British Agent in Kuwait, Captain Knox. In surprising candour Mubarak claimed that he could not trust Ibn Saud

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<sup>138</sup> Acting Consul, Basra (Monahan) to Ambassador, Constantinople October 7, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R107/VI.

<sup>139</sup> Vice-Consul, Karbala to Resident, Turkish Arabia, Baghdad, August 25 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E2/R95/VI

<sup>140</sup> On 8 November 1904 the Ottoman Garrison in Hafash, Yemen was attacked by rebels lead by Imam Muhammad Yahya. This was the latest in a series of minor uprisings against Ottoman rule. This incident was a serious blow to Ottoman prestige because it resulted in the complete destruction of the fort and the loss of 400 soldiers. As rebellion spread, attacks increased in frequency, leading to the seizure of Sanaa the capital city. Between late November to early December, Ottoman resources and attention focused more on Yemen and shifted away from central Arabia. The Porte decided to mend relations with Ibn Saud and withdraw its support for the Al-Rashid. See 'Memorandum of Yemen Insurrection of 1904-1905', Military Attaché, Embassy, Constantinople March 14, 1905, FO 406/21 F8482/E1/R52/II.

<sup>141</sup> Nuri Pasha, the vali of Basra (1901-1904), hoped to send the message via Mubarak, knowing that Ibn Saud would certainly receive it. He still required the assistance of someone to pass the message to Kuwait, however, all three individuals who were approached declined to do so. Yet all three did subsequently relay the incident to Mubarak. Resident Kuwait (Knox) to Resident Gulf (Cox) September 3, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E/2/R127/VI.

linked to the Turks and feared his own political future could be jeopardised.<sup>143</sup> Mubarak sought the Agent's advice. It seemed that Ibn Saud's successes were straining relations with his old mentor. However, when the Government of India learned of the candid discussions that were taking place, alarm bells went off. Officials were furious that Knox was talking so freely and intimately with Mubarak about Najd. The Viceroy instructed Knox to "abstain from offering advice to Sheikh Mubarak on Nejd affairs".<sup>144</sup> India wanted their man to talk sense into Mubarak and get him to stop "rocking the boat" but not to entertain discussions on policy.

The political fallout however, had already begun. In London, the Turkish Ambassador complained to the Foreign Secretary about the presence of a British official at Mubarak's court. The Ambassador accused Knox of interfering in the administrative matters of Kuwait, fraternising with local notables and hoisting the Union Jack over his residence. These actions were seen as altering the status quo.<sup>145</sup> Making matters worse was anti-British propaganda by German agents in Turkey and by the press in Germany. Rumours circulating in Constantinople were that Britain orchestrated the revolt in Yemen as part of a scheme to gain supremacy in the Arabian Peninsula and would eventually proclaim a protectorate over Kuwait and central Arabia.<sup>146</sup> The Foreign Office had already been highly sensitive to criticism and quickly tried to diffuse the situation by ordering

<sup>142</sup> Resident, Kuwait (Knox) to Resident, Gulf (Cox) September 3, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E/2/R127/VI.

<sup>143</sup> Salwa Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah*, p.123. Alghanim portrays Mubarak as fearful but it is also likely that he was using the incident to manoeuvre for greater British support. The fact that the Resident had recently been appointed to Kuwait clearly meant that Britain was taking a keen interest in this country. Mubarak had always boasted about his intimate relationship and sought to cement his ties allowing him to rely less on his protestations of loyalty to the Porte.

<sup>144</sup> Government of India to Resident, Gulf (Cox), October 9 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E5/R127/VI.

<sup>145</sup> SSFA to Councillor, British Embassy, Constantinople, November 2, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R111/VI. Also SSFA to Government of India November 18, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R140/VI.

<sup>146</sup> *Memorandum Respecting the State of Affairs in Arabia*, prepared by General Staff, War Office for the Director of Military Operations, Foreign Office, May 23, 1905, FO 406/22/F8548/E1/R57/III.



the Government of India to withdraw their man from Kuwait.<sup>147</sup> The Viceroy, Lord Curzon, refused and was displeased with the attitude of the Foreign Office. Inter-departmental tensions rose considerably and relations between the Government of India and the Foreign Office hit a low point. In a memo to the Foreign Secretary, Curzon complained bitterly against the policy. Couched in polite language that disguised his displeasure the Viceroy asserted that the Sheikh of Kuwait already had doubts about the value of Britain's friendship, and that withdrawing Knox would alienate Mubarak completely. Both Mubarak and Ibn Saud might then be forced to submit to Turkey providing the Ottomans a presence along the Gulf coast.<sup>148</sup> Eventually this would also allow other powers, notably Germany, France and Russia, to gain long sought after access to the Gulf, which would in turn pose a threat to lines of communication to India. The British Agent in Kuwait was seen to perform a vital role, serving as point man in the Gulf, reporting on nefarious activity – whether gun running, piracy or slavery as well as keeping a watch on political activity. Withdrawing Knox would be extremely harmful for the security of the Gulf.

After the Viceroy's strong protest the Foreign Office backtracked. Reassurances were given to India that the withdrawal was meant to be temporary. The Agent would not be removed suddenly or change his function in such a way as to imply any alteration in the British attitude to Kuwait.<sup>149</sup> However, officials in London were still perturbed by what was seen as the Indian Government's "complete misapprehension of the circumstances".<sup>150</sup> In any case the matter slowly died down. Months later the Foreign Secretary declared that he did "not consider that there would

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<sup>147</sup> The Foreign Office had assumed the appointment of Knox was temporary and had expected that he would be withdrawn in any case. Foreign Office to India Office, October 20, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/R101/VI. Also SSFA (Broderick) to Government of India, November 11, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R125/VI.

<sup>148</sup> Government of India to SSFI (Broderick), November 19, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R129/VI. For more details of the row between India and the Foreign Office see Howarth *The Desert King*, p. 47.

<sup>149</sup> SSFA (Broderick) to Government of India November 21, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R132/VI; Foreign Office to Government of India, November 25, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/R136/VI.

be any advantage in further pursuing the discussion of the subject".<sup>151</sup> Knox was never recalled but the incident marked one of the last times that the Foreign Office would defer to the Government of India over Kuwait.

### Saudi-Ottoman Political Relations

Ibn Saud did not wish to rely on Mubarak as his only conduit for contacts with the Porte. He also tried to use the Sharif of Mecca, Awn al-Rafiq whom he addressed as the "recognised leader of Arab tribes and sheikhs".<sup>152</sup> Ibn Saud sought to make the Sharif "the channel of all correspondence between him and the Sublime Porte". Claiming that there had been a misunderstanding, Ibn Saud asserted that he had no intention of revolting against the Imperial Porte, nor of disobeying any order of the Sultan. He apologised for fighting Ottoman soldiers but claimed that this was in self-defence. Ibn Saud promised to return all the booty, including guns and rifles belonging to the Ottoman soldiers that were taken in battle. He had simply been defending his territory from the usurper Al-Rashid as the lawful ruler of Najd. Out of the desire to resolve matters Ibn Saud was willing to accept "any reasonable terms" imposed upon him by the Sultan.<sup>153</sup> Little however was achieved by this tactic because the Sharif had no intention of acting as an intermediary for Ibn Saud and rebuffed this approach.

Refusing to give up, another appeal was made, this time by Abdul Rahman directly to the Ottoman Sultan. Submitting himself and his family Abdul Rahman claimed that the Al-Saud had always been vassals of the Ottoman Sultan:

I am one of the faithful servants of the Shadow of God, whose family from father to son, has lavished its blood and treasure in the glorious service of the Caliphate. I have no thought or aspiration save that of meriting the approbation of my

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<sup>150</sup> Foreign Office to India Office November 25, 1904 FO 406/18 F8420/R136/VI.

<sup>151</sup> Foreign Office to India Office March 18, 1905, FO 406/21 F8482/R48/II.

<sup>152</sup> Ibn Saud to Sharif of Mecca, December 1904. A copy of Ibn Saud's letter was obtained by the British Vice-Consul Jeddah and was reported to the Foreign Office. See Vice-Consul, Jeddah to SSFA, January 3 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/E1/R54/I.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



Sovereign....I am submissive to every order and command of the shadow of god. I neither follow instigations of any foreigner, nor am I the means of communication with any foreigners. In fact, under the protection of His Imperial Majesty there is no seditious agent or medium of foreigner in all these regions.<sup>154</sup>

He also accused the Al-Rashid of poisoning relations between themselves and the Porte. This request and the fact that the Al-Rashid had also asked for Ottoman mediation prompted the dispatch of 3000 men to prevent further escalation of hostilities in the area.<sup>155</sup>

Matters were suddenly complicated by an innocuous request to obtain travel permits for British officers. In late December 1904 the Government of India had requested the Embassy in Constantinople to arrange permits for a survey team to visit the *vilayets* of Basra and Baghdad. J.G. Lorimer, the famous compiler of the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, was to lead the team. The purpose of the mission was to collect data and other material for the *Gazetteer*. In an audience at the Porte on January 5 1905, Embassy officials were shocked when they were accused of trying to organise an espionage mission.<sup>156</sup>

The source of the accusation was the new vali of Basra, Ahmad Mukhlis Pasha. He had urged the Porte to deny permission to Lorimer and

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<sup>154</sup>Letter of Abdul Rahman Al-Saud to Ottoman Grand Vizier, 28 January 1905, enclosure in Ambassador Constantinople, to SSFA, January 31, 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/E2/R71/I. It should be noted that while Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.248, asserts that it was the Ottomans who made the offer to Abdul Rahman, other such as Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.79, McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.30 and Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, p.32 suggest that it was Abdul Aziz who made his father take the initiative. However, it seems clear from the record that British officers in the region knew the Porte was behind the whole incident and the vali of Basra was the chief instigator. It was the Ottoman official who sent messages through secondary channels to the Al-Saud suggesting that a submission be made to the Porte in order for matters to be resolved. See Resident, Gulf (Cox) to Government of India, September 5, 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E2/R103/VI. Also, Acting Consul, Basra, (Monahan) to Councillor (Townley), British Embassy, Constantinople, February 24, 1905, FO 406/21 F8482/R47/II. The Consul states that "I have no doubt that the first overtures came from the Acting Vali (Basra) Fakhri Pasha".

<sup>155</sup> Intercepted telegram from Ottoman Grand Vizier (Sultan) to Minister of Interior, October 17, 1904, in Councillor, Embassy Constantinople, to SSFA, November, 8 1904, FO 406/18 F8420/E1/R122/VI See also Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, p.63.

<sup>156</sup> Memorandum, British Embassy Constantinople, January 5 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/E1/R30/I

his team because on their previous visit to Kuwait they had conducted "suspicious operations".<sup>157</sup> Mukhlis believed that the real purpose of the mission was to meet Ibn Saud and encourage him to rebel against the Porte. Such an interpretation was likely the result of Ottoman frustration with the presence of Knox in Kuwait and with British interference in territory that the Porte considered its own. It took vehement denials and many attempts by the British Ambassador in Constantinople and the Foreign Secretary in London before the matter was finally smoothed over.<sup>158</sup> With tensions high, the Foreign Secretary also reiterated to the Government of India the need to ensure that Knox did not interfere in central Arabian politics:

His Majesty's Government wish it to be clearly understood that their influence and interest are to be strictly confined to the coast-line of Eastern Arabia, and that nothing is to be said or done to connect them, even in an indirect way, with the fighting now going on in the interior.<sup>159</sup>

Nevertheless, this incident raised concerns among Ottoman officials about the extent of British interests in Arabia. It became imperative to settle the dispute between the Al-Rashid and the Al-Saud to avoid providing Britain with an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. A meeting was arranged between Mukhliss Pasha and Ibn Saud. Mubarak organised the venue so that he would not be left out of the discussions. The meeting was held in Safwan on the border between Kuwait territory and the Basra district.<sup>160</sup> Unsure of how events would unfold, Mubarak brought along a

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<sup>157</sup> Secretary, Embassy Constantinople to SSFA, January 10, 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/R30/I. Ahmad Mukhlis Pasha was vali of Basra from 1904-1906.

<sup>158</sup> The Ottoman Ambassador in London also made complaints to the British Foreign Secretary, see SSFA to Embassy Constantinople January 11, 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/R22/I. In the end Lorimer did not visit, Najd or Hasa. To avoid inciting Ottoman displeasure he confined his surveys to the Trucial Coast and Oman. Government of India to SSFI, January 29 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/E1/R60/I.

<sup>159</sup> SSFA (Broderick) to Government of India December 30 1904, FO 406/19 F8503/E1/R4/VII.

<sup>160</sup> Councillor (Townley), Embassy Constantinople, to SSFA, January 24 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/R56/I.



private escort of 1,000 men to provide security.<sup>161</sup> The British Resident, Percy Cox also took precautions. He made sure that a British warship, the *Sphinx* was in Kuwait harbour to provide Mubarak with protection. There were two meetings, on February 8 and 13. Ibn Saud did not attend but was represented by his father, Abdul Rahman.<sup>162</sup> During the meetings, Mukhliss Pasha indicated that he was authorised to offer Abdul Rahman the position of 'qaimaqam' (<sup>District Governor</sup> administrator) of Najd if he recognised Ottoman suzerainty.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, Ottoman forces would withdraw to the area of al-Qasim, which lay in between Najd and Hail, and act as a buffer between the two sides. Abdul Rahman had to seriously consider the proposal. He had no other choice.<sup>164</sup> However, before an agreement could be completed a revolt in Yemen overshadowed these discussions. The Porte was forced to reassess its presence in central Arabia and decided to bow out and reassigned its garrisons for duty in the south.<sup>165</sup> The Ottoman withdrawal greatly enhanced Ibn Saud's prestige and provided him with the freedom to consolidate his position. It also allowed him to return to court Britain actively for aid.

David Howarth narrates an incident that occurred in 1905 which made an impression on the British officers in the Gulf. Ibn Saud sent two men to Bahrain. One arrived at the telegraph office where a long, expensive

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<sup>161</sup> Government India to SSFI, January 23, 1905, FO 406/19/F8503/E1/R7/VII.

<sup>162</sup> Acting Consul Basra, to Councillor, British Embassy, Constantinople, February 24 1905, FO 406/21 F8482/R47/II. See also Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia* p. 63.

<sup>163</sup> Report from Consul, Basra in Councillor (Townley), Embassy Constantinople, to SSFA, February 17, 1905, FO 406/20 F8472/R96/I. It is clearly indicated in this report that Abdul Rahman accepted the terms of the vali. However, in contrast to this Goldrup writes that Abdul Rahman "did not accept these demands", but was proudly defiant and cleverly manoeuvred around the Ottoman conditions. See Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, p.63. This discrepancy could be attributed to Goldrup's citation of a more romanticised version of events in Saud ibn Hidhlul, *Tarikh Muluk al-Su'ud*, Riyadh: Matabi al-Riyadh, 1961, p.74.

<sup>164</sup> Lacey refers to this event as marking a "total reversal of his hitherto anti-Ottoman policy". However in fact Ibn Saud had not been anti-Ottoman as much as a political opportunist. While doctrinally he may have been against their conduct, he was politically indifferent to them so long as he was able to take over Najd. In fact his own family had survived the bleak years of exile in the 1890's upon the stipend provided to his father by the Ottoman Government. Lacey also mistakenly credits Abdul Aziz with accepting the Ottoman title, when in fact it was Abdul Rahman. Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.79.

telegram was sent to the Ottoman Sultan expressing Ibn Saud's loyalty and his wish to remain a faithful servant. The second man went to the British Political Agent with a telegram that offered Ibn Saud's submission to Britain. In it the Saudi ruler stressed that he was confident of his ability to defeat Ottoman forces. However, he sought a treaty with Britain that would protect him from an Ottoman counter attack launched from the Gulf coast. The British Political Agent dutifully transmitted the message but subsequently obtained a copy of the message sent to the Porte, and discovered the trickery. The Agent was highly amused. Howarth states that : "such whole hearted duplicity always seemed to delight the British officials in the Gulf; there was indeed something charming about it". It was an example of the "disarming innocence of the Arabs".<sup>166</sup> Officials at the Foreign Office were amused but did not take the request seriously and again the King was ignored.

With finances and supplies running low, Ibn Saud looked eastwards to find some relief. In the history of the Al-Saud his ancestors had extracted tribute from the Sheikhs along the Trucial coast, not to mention from wealthy traders who possessed substantial taxable sums. With that in mind an expedition was launched towards the Trucial coast. It would also allow his men to show off the weapons and equipment captured from Ibn Rashid and the Ottomans. However, this movement of Saudi forces spread alarm across the coastal towns. Appeals were made to the British Resident, Percy Cox, to restrain the marauding Muwahhidun forces. Subsequently, a warning was issued to Ibn Saud that any attacks on Britain's Trucial protectorates would be viewed with displeasure. Saudi forces were told not to approach the Trucial states in the hope of extracting money, for that

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<sup>165</sup>'Memorandum of Yemen Insurrection of 1904-1905', Military Attaché, Embassy, Constantinople March 14, 1905, FO 406/21 F8482/E1/R52/II. Also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.19.

<sup>166</sup>Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.54.; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Part I, Vol. II, Chapt.VIII, pp.1157-1159.



would certainly provoke a British reaction.<sup>167</sup> Knowing when to extricate himself from complicated situations, Ibn Saud heeded the warning and his forces retreated.

### The End of a Rival

It would become unnecessary for Ibn Saud to worry about the long term financing of his battles with Al-Rashid. In April 1906 his agents found Abdul Aziz Ibn Rashid's main camping ground at Rawdat al-Muhanna. Mustering his forces Ibn Saud led a dawn attack on an unsuspecting army. In the ensuing battle Ibn Rashid was shot and killed thus bringing to a close an era in the Saudi-Rashidi dispute.<sup>168</sup> His successor, Mite'b, was a boy of eighteen and he quickly agreed a truce with Ibn Saud.<sup>169</sup> To strengthen his position Ibn Saud married the widow of his former foe. As Ibn Saud was triumphant the house of Al-Rashid descended into squabbling causing turmoil within the family for decades to come.<sup>170</sup>

By this time it was clear to the British Resident, Percy Cox, that Ibn Saud was an established force in central Arabia and a major player in Gulf politics. In the past Britain's dominance had been achieved through fostering rivalry among Arab leaders, tribal chiefs and the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman empire. However, with the emergence of a single powerful leader in central Arabia, Cox realised that British policy needed to adjust to realities on the ground. Formal relations would have to be established with Ibn Saud. With this in mind Cox sent a detailed letter on September 16, 1906 to the Government of India in which he advocated reaching an agreement with Ibn Saud:

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<sup>167</sup> Resident, Gulf (Cox) to Agent, Kuwait (Knox), January 17, 1906, FO 206/27. Knox was tasked with the job of reigning in the Saudi forces. See also Graves, *The Life of Percy Cox.*, p.104.

<sup>168</sup> al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*, p.62, and Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.74-75.

<sup>169</sup> Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, October 13 1906, PRO FO 371/345 #10143, Enc. 9, p397.

<sup>170</sup>The first successor was eldest son Mit'eb but he along with his two brothers were murdered by a rival for leadership. That man was also killed within a year by his own brothers in a dispute over power. Philby *Saudi Arabia*, pp.250-251; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp. 20-21.

I am at the same time aware that it has been a recognised principle of their (Foreign Office) policy not to allow themselves to become involved in the tempestuous politics of Central Arabia. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that we have principles and interests to consider other than the pursuit of the purely negative doctrine of aloofness above mentioned, and I cannot see that these are in any way served by our carrying that doctrine to an extreme point and by our treating the predominant Arab element in Najd with an active neglect which not only places us in an unnecessarily unfavourable position for safeguarding the other interests referred to but which, if persevered in, may be mistaken for hostility on our part and may engender a reciprocation of that sentiment on the part of the Wahhabi Chief.<sup>171</sup>

To continue to ignore Ibn Saud could turn him into an enemy and undermine stability in the area—whereas a treaty would make him an ally of Britain. With a treaty in hand other British allies such as the Sultan of Muscat and the Trucial chiefs would be less fearful of attacks from Najd. Britain might also be able to enlist help of Ibn Saud to reduce piracy in the northern Gulf. Cox warned that many tribes had united under the ruler of Najd and if Britain did not support him some other power might do so to the detriment of His Majesty's interests.<sup>172</sup>

To understand how the report of the Resident reached London requires some description of how British colonial administration was divided. Reports from eastern Arabia, the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia were sent to offices of the Government of India in Bombay and Calcutta with copies eventually making their way to the India Office in London.<sup>173</sup> Policy decisions for these areas rested with the Secretary of State for India. However, the Hijaz and western Arabia, were considered to be under the jurisdiction of British officials in Egypt and Sudan who reported directly to the Foreign Office in London. British officials in Egypt were anxious to secure the sea routes between Europe through the Suez Canal and the Red

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<sup>171</sup>Resident, Gulf (Cox) to Government of India, September 16, 1906, FO 371/345 #10143/Enc. 2, p.391.

<sup>172</sup>Graves, *Life of Sir Percy Cox*, pp.104-105.



Sea to the Indian Ocean. Policy decisions regarding this region were made by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in London.<sup>174</sup> Sir George Rendel was to comment: "It was hardly surprising that we should therefore find ourselves with one policy toward the Hashemite rulers of the Hijaz in Western Arabia, another toward the Saudis of Najd in the east."<sup>175</sup>

Inevitably it was a matter of some time before Percy Cox's report reached London. However, his comments were forwarded along with a thirteen point memo by his colleagues in the Government of India.<sup>176</sup> While the memo agreed with some of what Cox said in principle, it did not support his conclusions. The Government of India believed that Britain had the upper hand vis a vis Najd because Ibn Saud would always need her assistance. The Ottomans would certainly not be granting him total independence and he would never be satisfied being a vassal of the Porte. Moreover, it was anticipated that if left to their own devices the Ottomans would withdraw their forces from eastern Arabia. Only then would it be necessary to decide on what policy to maintain toward Ibn Saud. There appeared to be little risk of alienating him. Thus in contrast to Cox's urgent tone, this memo was quite relaxed. In any case the onus of decision was placed on the Foreign Office:

The question is one primarily for decision by His Majesty's Government, and we hesitate to offer our advice in a matter in which India is only interested in a secondary degree and merely because a disturbance of the position on the Arabian coast might adversely affect Indian trade and our political arrangements in the Gulf.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The Government of India took almost 5 months to forward Cox's report to London for consideration. A comprehensive memorandum with numerous enclosures was sent on February 21 1907. See PRO FO 371/345 #10143, pp.384-388.

<sup>174</sup> Howarth *Desert King*, p.42.

<sup>175</sup> George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service, 1913-1954*, London:John Muray, 1957, p.57. Rendel was a career British Foreign Service official who rose to become head of the Eastern Department.

<sup>176</sup> Government of India to Foreign Office, February 21 1907, PRO FO 371/345 #10143, pp.384-388.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

The Government of India suggested that Ibn Saud be told of Britain's desire to maintain friendly relations with him, so long as he respected their interests and those of the Trucial chiefs. However, it was not deemed appropriate to enter into a treaty which might very well incite Ottoman moves against him.<sup>178</sup>

Yet even this was deemed too much by the Foreign Office. In their estimation, even if Ibn Saud was able to take over all of Najd and expel the Ottomans there was every possibility that the Ottoman empire would retake Arabia. Ibn Saud was still an Ottoman subject and the British could not enter into treaty relations with such a rebel. The supporters of the 'Ottoman first' policy at both the Government of India and the Foreign Office forced the subject to be dropped. This view was also held by Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the British Ambassador to Constantinople, who was very much against any involvement with Ibn Saud.<sup>179</sup> This did not dissuade Cox. His persistence kept the issue circulating among officials both in India and Britain. Finally, the India office sent instructions to the Government of India: after consultation with the Foreign Office there was no need to give any reply or have any communication with Ibn Saud.<sup>180</sup> This was another blow to Saudi hopes, but despite facing severe challenges to his authority from within he was to surprise the British by his initiatives.

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<sup>178</sup> Viceroy to Foreign Office, February 15<sup>th</sup> 1907, PRO FO 371/345 #5937, p.380.

<sup>179</sup> Ambassador, Constantinople to Foreign Office April 1 1907, PRO FO 371/345 #11067, pp. 411-417. See correspondence between O'Connor and India Office, February 1904, in IOR L/P&S/18/B200. For details of other British officials opinions see H.V.F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926*, Maryland: University Publications of America. 1987, pp. 13-15. And Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, p.107.

<sup>180</sup> India Office to Government of India, May 3, 1907, PRO FO 371/345 #14856, p.423.



### Chapter 3

#### Rivals and Rebels: Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein

Following the 1841 Treaty of London, European powers stripped the Egyptian ruler, Muhammad Ali, of all territories he had conquered at the expense of Constantinople. As a result the western region of Arabia, known as the Hijaz, was returned to Ottoman jurisdiction. Separated from the interior of Arabia by a range of mountainous hills, the importance of Hijaz lay in the presence of the two holy cities of Islam; Mecca and Medina.<sup>1</sup> Once again the leadership of Hijaz was passed to the family of Banu Hashim which counted Prophet Muhammad among its descendants. In November 1908 Hussein ibn Ali was selected as the Grand Sharif of Mecca.<sup>2</sup> At one time it had been a tradition to send the young sons of the Sharifian family to live among the bedouin for a period of time. This experience was to promote strength and endurance as well as teach some degree of humility and an appreciation for simple desert life. Relations with their adoptive family would be lifelong, sometimes closer to those with their own consanguine family.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*, p.121 & pp. 131-132; Troeller, *Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.38. Also Lawrence Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia 1902-1932: The Development of a Wahhabi Society*, Ph.D Thesis, UCLA, 1971 p.110

<sup>2</sup> Sharif Aoun al-Rafiq died in 1905 leaving no sons to succeed him. There were several contenders for the title of Sharif but Hussein was chosen with the help of well placed bribes. Hussein was descended from a branch of the family that would not have ordinarily been chosen for accession to the Sharifate. One of the other candidates was Ali Haidar who was the great-grandson of Sharif Ghalib (1786-1815) and believed he was the rightful choice. A detailed account of the circumstances surrounding Hussein's appointment can be found in the diaries of Ali Haidar, published as George Stitt, ed., *A Prince of Arabia: the Emir Shereef Ali Haidar*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1948, pp.92-110. This was the same year in which military officers under the name of the Committee for Union and Progress (or Young Turks) rose to challenge the authority of the Caliph. For a British perspective on the period see the autobiography of Sir Andrew Ryan *The Last of the Dragomans*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1951, p. 259. The Young Turks were primarily students from the military and law colleges. Ryan gained wide experience of Ottoman politics when he served at the British Embassy in Constantinople, 1899-1914, and he later knew Ibn Saud when he served as British Minister in Jeddah, 1930-1936.

<sup>3</sup> Swiss traveler, Charles Didier observed this custom being practised during the late 1800's. Didier, *Sojourn with the Grand Sharif of Makkah*, p.88.

Hussein had a different experience. He spent many years enjoying a life of self-indulgence and intrigue in the palaces of Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> However, shortly after he assumed office in the Hijaz, a constitutional crisis in Constantinople arose which resulted in the Sultan reforming the government in a 'bloodless revolution'. With this Hussein sought to take advantage of the opportunity to broaden his powers in the Hijaz.<sup>5</sup> Financing his ambitions would require more than the revenues he derived from the pilgrimage trade. He had no qualms about demanding increased taxes from the beduin tribes.<sup>6</sup> He also sought out new areas from which to extract wealth.

Until 1910 there was little contact between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein. However, Hussein was eager to expand his own power-base and anxious to obtain tribute from surrounding tribal groups. Among these were the Utaybah, whose territory lay at the eastern frontier of Hijazi in the plains of al-Qassim. In 1910 Hussein sent men across the mountains into the *dira* (tribal territory) of the Utayba to add their tribute to his coffers. However, Utayba lands were also astride the Najd-Hijaz caravan routes which were strategically important to Ibn Saud. In fact, Ibn Saud considered the Utayba as his subjects. He had sent his brother Sa'ad to gather taxes and tribute for Najd. The men of Sharif Hussein arrested

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<sup>4</sup>George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938, p.103. Also Gerald DeGaury, *Rulers of Mecca* London: Harrap, 1951, p.264

<sup>5</sup>Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid was pressured by 'Young Turks', primarily students from the military and law colleges to institute reforms and constitutional rule. This also saw the increase of Turkish identity or 'Turkification' among ruling elites. Ryan, *The Last of the Dragomans*, pp.52-78

<sup>6</sup>Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 158-160. Despite being consumed by internal political intrigue the Ottoman government was very interested in maintaining influence in Arabia. In 1910 the city of Medina was promoted from being a *sanjak* of the Hijaz vilayet to an independent sanjak of its own. This extended the influence of Istanbul directly into Hijaz and maintained watch over important trade routes, the pilgrimage and activities of the Al-Rashid of Hail. Hussein felt this a threat to his authority and ability to act autonomously. He complained to Istanbul and argued that Ottoman officials sent for service in Hijaz were inexperienced and unfamiliar with local customs. There was admittedly a problem in finding qualified people that wanted to serve in the towns and outposts in Hijaz where living conditions were harsh and Hussein made life even more difficult for them with his frequent quarrels. Nevertheless, it was Istanbul's desire to watch Hussein rather than remove him, since his lineage was important.



Sa'aad and brought him back to Hijaz. Hussein demanded that Ibn Saud pay annual tribute to Hijaz if he wished his brother released. Though humiliated and embarrassed Ibn Saud agreed. But, as soon as his brother was safely returned the pledge was repudiated on the grounds of duress. He would have led a campaign against the Sharif himself had it not been for the sudden revolt from within his family.<sup>7</sup>

The revolt was led by Saud ibn Faisal, (the elder brother of Ibn Saud's father, Abdul Rahman) who was joined by several of his uncles and nephews. They were unhappy with the line of succession. Although Saud ibn Faisal had supported the struggle to regain 'ancestral lands', the prospect of forfeiting his own position of power and the denial of his sons and grandsons the chance of succession did not sit comfortably with him. Saud ibn Faisal and his sons along with disgruntled beduin (mainly from the Ajman tribe) left Riyadh to set up a rival power base south of the city where they found support among the Hazzani tribe.<sup>8</sup>

This challenge to his authority could not go unpunished—Ibn Saud risked other tribes perceiving him as weak, lending a serious blow to his credibility. More immediate threats were emanating from Hail as the Al-Rashid were active once again. In fact it was not until over a year later that Abdul Aziz could divert his attention to subdue the rebels. Afterwards, the Hazzani chiefs who had supported the rebels were executed, but Saud ibn Faisal was offered the choice of exile or a pledge of loyalty. Choosing the latter, Saud was welcomed back into the fold and as a symbol of his re-entry he married Ibn Saud's sister, Noura. Not all the rebels surrendered however. Several brothers of Saud ibn Faisal and their sons refused to

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<sup>7</sup>These were the sons and grandsons of his paternal uncle, Saud ibn Faisal who sought to take power into their own line, a situation which was not fully resolved until 1916. Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.38, McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.32.

<sup>8</sup>Alexander Bligh, *From Prince To King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century*, New York: NYU Press, 1984, p.17. The Hazzani's main base was the town of Laiyla in south central Arabia. Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.27.

pledge loyalty and found refuge with Sharif Hussein in Hijaz where they were to continue their intrigues.<sup>9</sup>

It became increasingly clear that to rely solely on his sizeable family to provide the backbone of his forces had dangerous implications. The long distances involved and his frequent absences required trustworthy souls without ambitions of power for themselves. His own children were still too young, his eldest son, Turki born in 1900, was barely in his teens. Ibn Saud needed an independent force, with its own fierce determination and loyalty to his cause. Ibn Saud also needed to expand for economic reasons. Najd had no outlets to the sea and relied on bringing supplies in through Kuwaiti ports. Although Ibn Saud had benefited from the friendship of the ruler Mubarak Al-Sabah, taxes levied on imports were high. Other port cities along the Gulf also gained revenue by taxing imports. The Saudi polity had to establish access to Gulf waters for two important reasons. First, supply routes would be secured and would not be subjected to harassment and taxation from the shaykhs whose territory straddled caravan routes inland. Second, a presence on the shores of the Gulf would raise the stature of Najd in the eyes of Britain and would force her to deal with Ibn Saud as a major player on the Gulf coast.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the fact that Britain had close ties to the Sheikhs of the Trucial Coast, and had defence treaties with them, it would be have been fool hardy for Ibn Saud to attempt an assault there. Instead, he cast his eye upon the large portion of the Gulf coast bordering Najd known as al-Hasa.<sup>11</sup> Though the region was under Ottoman control, military setbacks due to war with Italy and conflicts in the Balkans forced Ottoman forces to be recalled to reinforce troops nearer to Constantinople. Moreover, al-Hasa was not a vital region of the empire and contained just a few forts with

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<sup>9</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.258 and McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, pp.32-33.

<sup>10</sup>George Linabury, 'The Creation of Saudi Arabia and the Erosion of Wahhabi Conservatism', *Middle East Review* Vol. XI, No. 1, Fall 1978, pp. 5-12. Also Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, p.135.

<sup>11</sup>Jubran Shamiyah, *al-Saud: Madihim wa Mustaqbalhum*, London: Riad Rayyes, 1986, p.119. Also Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, pp.81-82.



small garrisons. The area was poorly administered and the local tribes had no love for their rulers from Istanbul.<sup>12</sup> With the Ottoman hold weak Ibn Saud took the opportunity to strike.

On the morning of May 9, 1913, a band of men scaled the walls of Hofuf, the capital city of al-Hasa. Catching the Ottoman guards by surprise they were able to take control quickly forcing the garrison to retreat into the main mosque. With a guarantee of safe passage out of the area, the Ottoman commander agreed to surrender.<sup>13</sup> The departing soldiers left behind stocks of rifles, ammunition, several artillery guns and several thousand dollars worth of treasure. With the capture of the capital Ibn Saud effectively had control over the whole province and he quickly secured the port towns of Qatif and Uqair.<sup>14</sup> Within weeks he would enlarge his taxable population base, increase his revenues, and guarantee that his supplies of goods, arms and provisions would arrive without having to pay taxes to any local chieftain. The attack on Hofuf had utilised a combination of forces with the bulk consisting of townsmen with Bedouin forces acting as backup. It would be the last time a major engagement would be undertaken with such a force. Ibn Saud had begun the process of forming his own independent army which was to be known infamously as the 'Ikhwan'.

### Mobilising New Forces: The Ikhwan

Ibn Saud and his father, Abdul Rahman, spent much of the period from 1902 up until the conquest of al-Hasa in a series of battles for territory and booty. Philby maintains that "in the rough and tumble of these fighting years there is little record of any special emphasis on the religious aspect of

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<sup>12</sup> Ottoman forces had been recalled from Basra, Baghdad and Hofuf to reinforce troops nearer Constantinople. For a detailed study of this period see Jacob Goldberg, 'The 1913 Saudi Occupation of Hasa Reconsidered' *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 1982, pp.21-29.

<sup>13</sup> Khair al-Din Zirkili, *Shibh al-Jazira fi ahd al-Malik Abd al Aziz* Beirut: 1970, part 1, pp.204-205. Shamiya, *al-Saud* pp.108-109.

<sup>14</sup> Arab Bureau Report, 'Relations with Ibn Saud', January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp.43-44.

their activities".<sup>15</sup> The members of the Saudi forces came from various tribal backgrounds but were composed mainly of townsmen. After successful campaigns the rise in territory that required administration put a strain on Ibn Saud's townsmen. They became increasingly reluctant to leave their homes, livestock, fields and commercial activities for long periods making it difficult to maintain a battle ready standing army.<sup>16</sup>

To switch to beduin forces was risky since they were known for their fickleness and had an almost mercenary like quality of being available to the highest bidder. The beduin lifestyle was fiercely independent. Eager to plunder and gain booty, they could turn and loot their own allies if the fight was not going in their favour, making them dangerous friends, as well as foes. The history of the Al-<sup>Saudi</sup> particularly in the nineteenth century, was marked by several defeats when beduin forces switched allegiance.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Saud nevertheless had to find a solution to this problem and it was this practical need that led to the formation of a new military force.

Traditionally the beduin maintained their relationships on the premise of fear or prosperity, joining those forces that they feared or that promised them great booty and material gain. This was part of the survival of the fittest lifestyle which accounted for their mercenary like quality. By settling the beduin and placing their basic needs of shelter, food and clothing near to them and by forcing them to develop relationships and dependency on non-tribal members it would make them less likely to attack, raid and cause problems to other towns and to civil order.<sup>18</sup> Ibn Saud would also have greater control over their movements and actions. Nor was it simply based on the premise that the beduin was primitive and unpredictable.

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<sup>15</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.261.

<sup>16</sup> Turki al-Hamad, *Political Order in Changing Societies, Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Southern California, 1985, p.77.

<sup>17</sup>During the reign of Faisal many beduin defected or abandoned their positions in the face of the superior forces of the Egyptian army. Abdul Aziz ibn Saud had himself experienced beduin fickleness when trying to gather a force to assault Riyadh in 1901.



Using Muwahhidun principles Ibn Saud would weaken tribal allegiances and replace them with loyalty to God and the *amir*. He sought to expand each beduin's sense of identity by extending tribal links and expanding social relations to integrate various tribes into a new communal identity of 'Ikhwan'. Those commitments were "religious yet secular".<sup>19</sup> Western observers like Howarth were awed by the ability of a man with no formal education living in harsh desert conditions to conceive of such ideas. Lacking worldly experience, or an education from one of the great seats of learning in Cairo or Baghdad, and studying only some religious texts and being confined to "fanatically narrow limits of Wahhabi (Muwahhidun) doctrine", it was considered amazing that the concept of creating an independent force could be conceived by Ibn Saud. He was considered a "genius" whose "spontaneous thoughts" revealed the methods for success. Yet Howarth was still surprised that a desert dweller like Ibn Saud came up with any system of government at all.<sup>20</sup>

Much of the literature on Saudi Arabia assumes that the Ikhwan were solely the creation of Ibn Saud. However, the term 'Ikhwan' is a generic label, which in Arabic means 'brotherhood' and a group using this name was already in existence. This was certainly the view of British intelligence officer, Gilbert Clayton, who reported that the Ikhwan movement was started by Harb and Mutayr tribesmen in order to revive Wahhabi tenets and that it was Ibn Saud who chose to associate himself with them "and of which he later assumed the spiritual leadership." <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a good Ikhwan vs. townsman comparison see Joseph Kostiner, 'The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15, No.3, July 1985, pp. 298-323.

<sup>19</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.68; also al-Hamad, *Political Order in Changing Societies, Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context*, pp.78-80.

<sup>20</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.68.

<sup>21</sup> G.F Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969 p.18. General Gilbert Clayton was a powerful and influential military intelligence officer. He served as Director of Military Intelligence and Agent in Sudan. His position put him into close contact with the most influential British officials in the Middle East. Clayton was a mentor to T.E. Lawrence and other intelligence officers. He was promoted to Chief Political Officer to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force by General Allenby and effectively administered Palestine after its capture in 1917 until April 1918 when Sir Arthur Money took over. Afterwards Clayton became advisor to the Egyptian Ministry of Interior tasked



H.V.F. Winstone also argued that the Ikhwan pre-existed Ibn Saud and that they "enlisted Ibn Saud to their cause" <sup>22</sup>

It was Philby, the closest western advisor to Abdul Aziz, who did the most to advocate the view that the Ikhwan were recruited and settled into fixed communities by Ibn Saud to give substance to his political and military ambitions.<sup>23</sup> Later writers picked up his argument, including Howarth and al-Yassini, who claim that it was Ibn Saud who had the idea of bringing beduin into fixed locations and involving them in agriculture, giving them a stake in a stable government and the need for a strong ruler. This was because, as Al-Yassini contends, that "Ibn Saud realised that no central authority and modern political structure could be established in an unstable tribal society".<sup>24</sup>

This author would contend that some semblance of the Ikhwan was already present in Najd. The strongest evidence is provided by research conducted by John Habib in the 1960's, when some of the original Ikhwan of Najd and al-Hasa were still alive.<sup>25</sup> Habib's interviews with survivors indicates that Ibn Saud had found the beginnings of the Ikhwan movement and used them as a means to "weld together many disruptive and hostile elements that had long existed in Najd".<sup>26</sup> Notions of religious reform and abandoning false practices are recurrent in Islamic history and traceable in the heritage of the Arabian Peninsula.

British officers in the field at the time, such as H.R. Dickson, the Political Agent in Kuwait, were also hard pressed to find accurate information about the Ikhwan. Ibn Saud himself was not of help in that regard, often distancing himself from them when he spoke to British

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with curbing nationalism and anti-British sentiments. In 1925 he was appointed to lead a mission to Ibn Saud for the purpose of agreeing a settlement with the Saudi ruler. (note: the mission's secretary was George Antonius of the Education Department of Palestine Government who later wrote the book *Arab Awakening*).

<sup>22</sup>H.V.F. Winstone, *Captain Shakespeare*, London: Quartet, 1978, p.151.

<sup>23</sup>Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.298.

<sup>24</sup>Al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, p.51.

<sup>25</sup>Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd: Its Rise, Development, and Decline*, p.35.



officials.<sup>27</sup> He preferred there to be uncertainty over the Ikhwan in an effort to conceal the extent of his relationship with them. Nevertheless there were practical considerations for Ibn Saud's support for the Ikhwan. Though he had managed to win battles with his band of townsmen, those forces would not be enough to extend conquests elsewhere. They had been supportive to Muwahhidun ideals of religious reform and revivalism but were not prepared to give up their commercial and agricultural activities.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, he had to be wary of his large extended family in which there were supporters as well as rivals to his authority. The rebellion of his uncle, Saud ibn Faisal, in 1910 and the revolt of the Ajman the following year were indicative of how family and tribal aspirations posed a threat. He also faced challenges from a belligerent Sharif Hussein who could, along with the Al-Rashid of Hail, field tremendous manpower. In addition, Hussein had the advantage of being able to obtain fresh supplies and equipment whenever he wished through the Damascus-Medina railway line. Thus for Ibn Saud it became important to establish a fighting force that was not tribally or family based and that could not be neutralised by Ottoman largesse. Such a force would be the key to greater expansion of the Saudi realm. Indeed the Ikhwan were to become an essential tool for preserving Ibn Saud's legitimacy and maintaining his political survival.<sup>29</sup>

### Ikhwan Settlements

The Ikhwan were those beduin who left their nomadic life for settled dwellings. This was known as *hijra* and mirrored the migration of the first Muslim community from Mecca to Medina. The settlements of the Ikhwan

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. However, even in Habib's research it was clear that it was not possible to trace one infidel or defining moment that caused the Ikhwan to be launched. That was still "clouded in mystery, confusion and contradiction".

<sup>27</sup>Dickson reported to London that Ibn Saud distanced himself from Ikhwan and little information could be gleaned about them. Report on the Operation of the Najd Mission, November 29, 1918, PRO FO 371/4144/4390. See also Habib, p.30.

<sup>28</sup> There was also the problem of the consistency and experience of the townsmen. Turki Al-Hamad, *Political Order in Changing Societies, Saudi Arabia: Modernization in a Traditional Context*, pp.78-80.

<sup>29</sup> Goldberg. 'The 1913 Saudi Occupation of Hasa Reconsidered', pp. 21-29.

were called *hujjar*. Inside life was devoted to religious study and worship as well as preparation for battle. Ibn Saud's long time advisor Harry Philby, commented that the settlement of the Ikhwan was:

an attempt to reform the Badawin elements of the country and to bring them into line with the settled towns and villages, whose stake in the land assured their general loyalty to any central administration. This in turn involved a partial settlement of the Badawin on the land to give them a similar interest in peace, subject to the corollary that such settlement should be on a mixed rather than a tribal basis.<sup>30</sup>

However, the organisation and settlement of the Ikhwan communities came after most of Najd had already been subdued by forces composed mainly of men from towns and villages. It was the desire to expand the realm that brought about the creation of a standing army that was self sustaining and battle ready.<sup>31</sup> Though Abdul Aziz had successfully employed his band of townsmen to throw out the Ottomans from al-Hasa there were problems in keeping his men mobilized. Townsfolk were tied to their property, business and family commitments and were anxious to return home after serving in battle. Abdul Aziz would have to rotate continually his forces to keep a balance of veteran and novice fighters.

More importantly, the promise to spread Islam made by Ibn Saud upon his capture of Riyadh, had yet to be fully realized, even a decade later. The majority of beduin still needed to be educated and led away from their ignorant ways. Sending teachers or ulema directly to tribal campgrounds would likely cause umbrage to the local chief's sense of authority and lead to a quick dispatch of the visitors. Nor could Ibn Saud effectively approach individual beduin with an offer of a stipend to join a conscripted force, because tribal animosities, blood feuds, and old quarrels made it impossible to put members of certain tribes together for very long. Ideas of tribal affiliation had to be broken and a unifying glue had to be

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<sup>30</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.22-23.

<sup>31</sup>It took several years to develop the Ikhwan in to a functioning fighting force. With the first settlements established in 1912-1913, they really came into play after 1916. See Joseph



found to bring various beduin together. This was the job of the Ikhwan *hujjar*.

The first Ikhwan settlement was established at al-Artawiyya in December 1912.<sup>32</sup> The earliest to arrive were members of the Mutayr tribe followed by a group of Harb. Known for their aggressive raiding, and their dislike of outsiders, the Mutayr were gradually taught the ways of the Ikhwan. Around two hundred *hujjar* were established, mostly in Najd, but with many located on the borders with Hijaz and Syria. Inside the settlements men from different tribes found themselves mixed together but still kept their tribal identity. *Hujjar* were often located in the tribal *diras*, grounds of the dominant tribe, with the chief selecting the area near good land and water. Many chiefs stayed in Riyadh as 'guests' where their presence symbolised their tribes fealty to Ibn Saud. In spite of this the period between 1913 and 1920 saw relatively few beduin joining *hujjar*. It was only after 1921 that steady numbers migrated and particularly from 1925-1928 when the Ikhwan were at their peak.<sup>33</sup>

As he had done with the townsfolk, Ibn Saud would first meet with the tribal chiefs to try and bring them into the fold. Only then could groups of teachers and *ulema* be sent, having obtained the chief's promise of safe passage. In fact with the beduin tribes Ibn Saud summoned all the chiefs to Riyadh, inviting them to enroll in a school set up by the *ulema* where they could be correctly guided for the benefit of themselves and their people. Their stay was of course subsidized by their host. One of the most significant concepts taught to the chiefs was that of *hijra*, or migration. In Islam 'the *Hijra*' is known as the migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, symbolizing the move from the land of unbelief to the land of Islam. With the invitation to become Ikhwan and true Muslims the Najd chiefs were told that they too had to make *hijra* from ignorance

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Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State' *Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 21 no.3, 1985, p.299.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 298-323. Also Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, p.136.

<sup>33</sup>Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp.136-137.

(*jahiliyya*) to the settled community life under the authority of Islam in the *hujjar*.<sup>34</sup>

According to the recollections of surviving Ikhwan in the 1960's, their life as beduin was one of ignorance of the laws and practices of Islam. Ancient tribal customs were followed and few knew the proper method of Islamic prayer. Men spent their time in tribal feuds and raids. Upon arrival in the *hujjar* however, the new members were given a new identity as a 'brother' or *akh* that substituted the tribal and family bonds of loyalty that, in many cases, they had left behind. In dress the Ikhwan distinguished themselves by tying a white cloth around the head instead of the usual *igal* (black cord headpiece) worn by the beduin.<sup>35</sup> For the Ikhwan this was a sign of a transition from nomadic life to the purity of a settled believer. Though the typical account has been to portray the Ikhwan as the most ferocious soldiers of Ibn Saud not all the Ikhwan were hardened warriors or intolerant of foreigners. As Rihani noted, he met Ikhwan whose "Wahhabism is older and therefore milder. They salaam the foreigner, smoke occasionally in secret, sing when they are in the desert and do not blame Ibn Sa'oud for befriending the infidel Ingliz".<sup>36</sup> That Rihani, a Christian, was able to live and travel among Ibn Saud's men shows the variety and complexity of the Ikhwan—a view which is less one dimensional than often portrayed. Rihani commented:

Among the men with whom I have lived two months, in my journey from Ar-Riyadh to Al-Qasim and Kuwait, were represented three classes of Ikhwan. Indeed, I had with me the mad Brother, the sensible, and the tolerant. Besides, one of the latter was a man of quips and gibes, who every time he lighted his pipe would take a puff and hand it to his neighbour saying: 'Smoke, ya Ikhwan! There is no smoke in al-Jannat.' ...But in times of war there is no difference among them. Every one is a warrior of Unitarianism, a Brother of those who obey Allah. And in times of peace every one is a

<sup>34</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.22-23.

<sup>35</sup> The *igal* was a black cord used by the beduin to bind the feet of his camel to keep it from running off and when not in use was kept on top of the head. Giving up the *igal* symbolized the giving up of nomadic life. See Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd: Its Rise, Development, and Decline*, pp.54-56.

<sup>36</sup> Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud*, p.212.



philosopher of the simplest life; -a stoic in endurance and submission, in adversity and pain, in poverty and piety.<sup>37</sup>

Rihani also points out that Ibn Saud used the different types of Ikhwan for different purposes: "the sensible are for service, the tolerant for commerce and foreign politics, the mad for battles of war."<sup>38</sup> Though the last class were difficult to keep under control, Ibn Saud enforced his authority through the withholding of subsidies.

### Problems of Subsidy

Since moving to a *hujjar* meant the abandonment of maintaining herds of camels and goats, the Ikhwan were reliant on outside sources for provisions. Devoting themselves to studying religious texts and preparing for battle the Ikhwan could not engage in farming or trading. Thus they had to be supported for their livelihood, which Ibn Saud provided through four types of subsidy known as *al-atilyaat*.<sup>39</sup> These were:

1. *al-Sharha*: Which consisted of monetary help and, or, gifts given to the chief of a tribe or the *amir* of a *hujjar* who would approach Ibn Saud when the need arose. Visitors would often dine with Ibn Saud and then sign their name in a special book. Afterwards Ibn Saud would decide on the type or amount of assistance to be given.

2. *al-Qa 'idah*: Was an annual gift of money given to those individuals whose name was in Ibn Saud's register, meaning that they had fought in battle on his side. The pre-fixed amount would be received by the individual upon presenting himself to the treasury (*bayt al-mal*) to collect it. The payment would only be stopped by special order of Ibn Saud which could be done as a punishment or warning. Of these categories only *al-Qaidah* was reserved for the Ikhwan, but they took from the other three types as well.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.213.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, pp.79-80.

3. *al-Barwah*: A gift of food; rice, tea, coffee, sugar, etc. which would be distributed by Ibn Saud's men in certain areas. Requests had to be made each year to Ibn Saud's office (*diwan*) in order to receive *al-Barwah*.

4. *al-Ma'awnah*: This was financial help given to those who wished to get married, needed to buy livestock, horses, or help in paying back a loan. The individual would personally approach Ibn Saud in each instance and have to wait for his decision.

Thus initially, the Ikhwan settlements devoted their time to religious study avoiding commerce, labour and farming as livelihood came from the subsidies of Ibn Saud. In reserving themselves for religious devotion they shunned worldly activities and concentrated on preparing for battle with the *mushrikeen* (polytheists).<sup>40</sup> By supporting the *hujjar*, as well as several other towns, Ibn Saud placed much strain on his resources. Habib also reports that some townspeople were jealous and resentful of the Ikhwan because of what was seen as the latter's privileged status and pride in being the guardians and protectors of the Muwahhidun community.<sup>41</sup> Ibn Saud had to balance the demands of the Ikhwan with those of village elite's and other ulema. At the same time he required self sufficient settlements that could sustain themselves without great external help and from which he could obtain well fed, motivated soldiers ready to fight.

However, not all members of a tribe would join the Ikhwan. Many families were split apart as some members joined while others refused. The Subai and Duwasir tribes, for example, had few in the Ikhwan, and among

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<sup>40</sup>When there was a revolt of the Ikhwan in 1929, it was led by tribal chiefs, not imams or ulema. The ulema had accepted Saudi rule to prevent *fitna*--the chiefs however were upset at the absolute authority of Ibn Saud and decried their loss of power. The Ikhwan also believed that Ibn Saud had violated Islamic principles by allowing innovations like the telegraph and motorcar, and for seeking the aid of 'unbelievers'. Furthermore, the Ikhwan were angered by the restrictions put on tribal raiding (*ghazw*) especially within their traditional stomping grounds northwest and northeast of Najd which had come under Iraqi and Jordanian authority. Since raiding was their pastime, and as Ikhwan they raided in name of Islam, they could not understand why they had to stop. For Ibn Saud their raiding jeopardised the emerging Saudi state and strained relations with neighbouring territories as well as Britain. See Kostiner 'On Instruments and their Designers' pp.299-323. Also Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p. 512.

<sup>41</sup>Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, p.79.



the tribes of Qahtan, Utayba, Harb and Mutayr there were sections that joined and others that did not. This divided tribal families.<sup>42</sup> Those who joined would give an invitation to their remaining family members to leave the life of the *mushrikeen* and become a true *mumin* (believer). If after being given *dawah* (the call) and invited three times to the path of 'true Islam' they did not 'repent', then they were also considered *mushrikeen* and liable to be fought against.

Within the *hujjar* some Ikwhan *ulema* disagreed with the policies of encouraging commerce and farming. These were seen as dangerous worldly practices and they blocked Ibn Saud's initial attempts to make the *hujjar* self sufficient. There was also growing competition among the new members of Ikhwān to cast off their links to the past. From their clothing to language, they attempted to purge 'un-Islamic' influences. Many gave up their livestock in the belief that they had to concentrate on religious study. Tensions with townspeople increased as the Ikhwān acted arrogantly and were condescending to those that did not join them. Ikhwān would not eat the food of non-Ikhwān nor would they return their greetings. The problem was, as Hafiz Wahba articulated: "The people [Ikwhān] had absorbed only a small amount of religious education and principle but they come to think that this alone constituted the whole of religion and that everything else is heresy".<sup>43</sup>

Ibn Saud had not supported the Ikhwān so that they could become an army of spiritual devotees that renounced the world and were a drain on his precious resources. With conflict between the Ikhwān and non-Ikhwān growing critical in 1916, Ibn Saud moved to address the problem from its root. He started by removing those *ulema* from the *hujjar* who disagreed with his policies. He then replaced them with new religious

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<sup>42</sup>Philby, *Heart of Arabia*, Vol. 1, p.300, and Habib, *The Ikhwān Movement of Najd: Its Rise, Development, and Decline*, pp.67-68.

<sup>43</sup>Hafiz Wahba, *Arabian Days*, London: Arthur Baker Ltd., 1964, p.126-127. Wahba was one of Ibn Saud's close advisors. Of Egyptian origin Wahba was used to a somewhat more sophisticated implementation of Islamic teachings and was not enamoured by Ikwhān excesses.

instructors who would also encourage the pursuit of commerce. They were to teach that tilling the earth and earning wealth were also virtuous pursuits.<sup>44</sup>

Ibn Saud attempted to bolster his influence by appointing the descendants of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab as *qadis* (judges) in the *hujjar*.<sup>45</sup> Expanding this tactic throughout Najd, Ibn Saud ensured that there was at least one scholar or *alim*, in each district. The city of Riyadh had six while the provinces of al-Qassim and al-Hasa each had three. In all about twenty *ulema* were under Ibn Saud's direct authority.<sup>46</sup> The teachings of the founder of the Muwahhidun movement were virtually institutionalised.

Ibn Saud also created a consultative council or *majlis al-shoura* made up of *ulema*, chiefs and men from influential families to bring a semblance of participatory rule. While in fact each *hujjar* was effectively run by the *hakim* (coordinator) and the *amir* (leader) who were directly responsible to Ibn Saud. The environment of the *hujjar* channelled the traditional beduin activities such as tribal raiding or '*ghazw*' into attacks on the *mushrikeen*, which were often, in the early days of the Ikhwan, simply other beduin that had refused the *da'wah* (call) to the fold of Islam. Tribal affiliation gradually became less of a determinant of friend and foe. In the *hujjar* at least the Ikhwan succeeded in "substituting the brotherhood of common faith for that of a common ancestry".<sup>47</sup> Although Ibn Saud had managed to institutionalise the Ikhwan and create his own private army, he was still under financial strain and turned more actively to seek the support and protection of Great Britain.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>45</sup>Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, p.61.

<sup>46</sup>Philby, *Heart of Arabia*, Vol. 1, p.297 and Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, p.117.

<sup>47</sup>Philby, *Heart of Arabia*, Vol. 1, p.297.



## Chapter 4

### Ibn Saud and Britain's 'Ottoman First' Policy

Despite his unsteady relationship with Britain, Ibn Saud was in great need of her support. Following his conquest of al-Hasa in May 1913 he was eager to formalise relations and obtain financial and security guarantees.<sup>1</sup> However, Britain was sensitive about engaging in relations with the ruler of Najd. More than two years had been invested by the Foreign Office in lengthy negotiations with the Porte. Issues included the delineation of Ottoman and British interests in Persia, the completion of the Baghdad Railway and Ottoman customs duties. London did not want to jeopardise its hard won positions by developing formal relations with Ibn Saud so soon after the *amir* had forced out the Ottoman garrison from al-Hasa as that might sour the agreements with Constantinople.<sup>2</sup>

However, Britain could not ignore the fact that Ibn Saud's successful challenge to Ottoman power had made rulers of the Trucial states extremely nervous. The Government of India came under pressure from its Arab allies to provide protection guarantees against Saudi encroachment. Reluctantly, two agents were dispatched to meet with Ibn Saud. The British Political Agent, Kuwait, Captain William Shakespeare and the Political Agent, Bahrain, Major A.P. Trevor arranged to meet with the Saudi ruler in the town of Uqair on the Gulf coast. Their task was to determine:

precisely in what way he [Ibn Saud] wanted the assistance of the British Government, seeing that he was aware of the friendly relations between the British and Turkish Governments, and of the neutrality of the former in respect of the differences between him and the latter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.F. Clayton, *An Arabian Diary* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp.19-20, and Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.267-268.

<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Edward Grey and Ottoman Envoy in London, Hakki Pasha would sign a provisional agreement on July 29 1913. Although al-Hasa was not specifically mentioned in the agreement it was deemed to be still part of the Ottoman Empire. B.C. Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs: 1914-1921*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 231-232. Also Harry Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, London: Robert Hale, Ltd., 1952, p.36.

<sup>3</sup> 'Memorandum of interview with Bin Saud', December 15 & 16, 1913, Political Agent, Bahrain to Political Resident, Gulf, December 20, 1913; part of India Office to Foreign

The two officers found him extremely congenial. After a warm welcome a large banquet was prepared in their honour. Performances of traditional beduin dance were given by local tribesmen. It was only much later, after the festivities had ended that Ibn Saud raised his concerns with the two British agents.

He spoke of his concern over the "preservation of his ancestral rights" and the desire to "renew and maintain the ancient friendship between his family and the British Government and to have his position secured".<sup>4</sup> In fact Ibn Saud was quite clear about his intentions. He wanted a treaty with Britain that recognised him as 'de facto' ruler of al-Hasa and for British ships to maintain the peace along the al-Hasa shore—just as they did along the rest of the Gulf coast.

Ibn Saud also made it known that the Ottomans were also interested in establishing treaty relations with him—which naturally would affect Britain's position in the Gulf. Although Ibn Saud stated that he would prefer not to be involved with the Ottomans nor any other power, he would nevertheless have to conclude an agreement with them if he had no other means of support. The Political agents, though surprised at the frankness of the ruler, could not respond to his request. Shakespeare was noncommittal—pointing out that it was highly unlikely that Britain would enter into negotiations with Najd and risk jeopardising Anglo-Ottoman relations.

Refusing to be put off, Ibn Saud tried to provoke a response by providing details of his negotiations with the Ottomans. He pointed out that the Porte would most likely prohibit him from having contacts with other foreign representatives. This veiled threat to British political interests was not lost on the Agents. Shakespeare informed the *amir* that:

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Office dispatch of papers relating to Ibn Saud, February 9, 1914, PRO FO 371/2123 F#6117/E4/R1, pp.260-262.

<sup>4</sup>Memorandum of interview with Bin Saud', December 15 & 16, 1913, Political Agent, Bahrain to Political Resident, Gulf, December 20, 1913; part of India Office to Foreign Office dispatch of papers relating to Ibn Saud, February 9, 1914, PRO FO 371/2123, F#6117/E4/R1, pp.260-262.



if he [Ibn Saud] continues to be the de facto ruler of the Hasa coast, it would be absolutely necessary for the local British authorities to have direct communication with him and his local officers for the settlement of various commercial, pearling and other disputes, which constantly arise, not to mention the apprehension of fugitive offenders and absconding divers. The British Government, therefore, would in all probability have to take up the question of the prejudice to their rights and interests which the existence of any clause excluding their representatives and subjects would entail. <sup>5</sup>

If these statements reassured Ibn Saud it did not deter him from making further veiled threats. In a surprise move Ibn Saud raised the subject of Qatar and Oman:

In the course of his remarks Bin Saud pointed out that, though he claimed the Trucial Oman and Katar (Qatar) as part of his ancestral dominions and could make his power felt there, he was quite willing to meet the wishes of Government in regard to them. He hinted that the only reason which restrained him from overrunning Katar (Qatar), and possibly Trucial Oman, after he had occupied Hasa and Katif, was his desire not to alienate the sympathy of the British Government. <sup>6</sup>

Ibn Saud was also careful to make it clear to the British Agents that he would take action against any of his enemies who took refuge in those territories. It is apparent from his negotiating style that Ibn Saud alternated his tactics. On the one hand he gave the impression of being accommodating. According to Shakespeare, Ibn Saud "seemed very much in earnest and most anxious to do whatever he could to meet the wishes of the (British) Government and to obtain their support." He indicated "on more than one occasion" his preference for relations with Britain, as "he had no faith in the permanency of any arrangement made directly with

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>The discussion was detailed in a confidential memorandum sent separately from the previous reports but is found along with the 'Memorandum of Interview with Bin Saud', December 15 & 16, 1913, Political Agent, Bahrain to Political Resident, Gulf, December 20, 1913; part of India Office to Foreign Office dispatch of papers relating to Ibn Saud, February 9, 1914, FO 371/2123, F#6117/E4/R1, pp.260-262.

that Turkish government.”<sup>7</sup> At one point he even claimed that he “would be willing to consult [with] the British Government in all important matters” if he could obtain its assurance of protection.<sup>8</sup> While, on the other hand, the *amir* had a persistent and sometimes intimidating demeanour. Agent Trevor noted that despite the friendly manner in which the discussions were conducted, Ibn Saud was frank about his ability to project force and implied threats to British interests if he was hindered in his goal to secure his ‘ancestral dominions’.<sup>9</sup>

In their reports, the British agents noted that despite his protestations of British friendship, Ibn Saud would “probably accept autonomy” under Ottoman suzerainty, and even pay a nominal tribute to Istanbul if pressured to do so. Their analysis of the Najdi ruler impressed the Government of India. An opportunity was seen to strengthen British interests in the Gulf. If better relations could be established with Ibn Saud “a valuable point would have been gained by us”.<sup>10</sup> Impressed by the possibilities the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, cabled London:

We think advantage should be taken of Bin Saud’s present friendly attitude which is doubtless due to his precarious position, to post native agent at once to Katif. This will not only secure us desired foothold on this coast, but will enable us to render our good offices to Turkish Government in dealing with Bin Saud should they require them.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, it was decided that Captain Shakespeare should remain with Ibn Saud in order to gather intelligence on the growing Najdi polity and improve Anglo-Saudi relations.

### Shakespeare and Ibn Saud

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<sup>7</sup>Major A.P. Trevor, Political Resident, Bahrain to Political Resident, Gulf, December 20, 1913 in FO 371/2123, F#6117/E4/R1, pp.259-260.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. See also ‘Relations with Ibn Saud’, Report by Arab Bureau, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/B251.

<sup>10</sup>Officiating Political Resident, Gulf to Government of India, January 4, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#6117/E3/R1, pp.2258-259.

<sup>11</sup>Viceroy to India Office, report entitled ‘Foreign Secret’, February 27, 1914 FO 371/2124 #48437



Shakespeare spent five months from February to June 1914 with the Najdi ruler, sending reports back to London which were exceedingly favourable towards Ibn Saud. The Captain praised Ibn Saud's ability to rally beduin forces and supplies from across Arabia.<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare reported how on one occasion Ibn Saud managed to rally a force of 5,000-7,000 men within a 150 mile radius of Riyadh. In another, he was able to send a thousand men to the port towns of al-Hasa, in order to deter the Ottoman Navy from launching an attack on the shore.

Throughout this period Shakespeare would note the alternating tactics of Ibn Saud—from reassurance to implied threats. Ibn Saud made it clear to Shakespeare that the longer Britain delayed in her support, the sooner he would have to “make his own arrangements” with the Porte. In such a case, Ibn Saud claimed, Istanbul would certainly insist on restoring former garrisons in al-Hasa and demand the exclusion of all foreigners from the area to the detriment of Britain, although he “had no intention of committing himself definitely to the Turks so long as he had any chance of arriving at an arrangement with the British Government.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, Shakespeare could not promise anything, nor could he indicate what His Majesty's Government would do. He was there to observe and report.

Shakespeare, however, did try to encourage a change in policy towards Arabia. He provided a detailed critique of British policy vis-à-vis the Porte, particularly the freedom granted to the Porte in dealing with Arabian issues. Istanbul was accused of largely neglecting Arabia—content simply to pit various tribes against each other while granting support to one faction, then another. Ottoman leadership had been ineffectual and the court weakened by corruption and intrigue. Moreover, the losses in the

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<sup>12</sup> This was remarkable in light of the fact that Ibn Rashid was being supplied by Istanbul via the Hejaz Railway line. Reports of mid-February 1914, indicated that a shipment of 30,000 rifles, hundreds of boxes of ammunition and several artillery pieces was sent for Ibn Rashid's men. See Shakespeare to Arthur Hirtzel, Undersecretary, India Office, 'Notes on Situation in C. Arabia and Bin Saud', June 26, 1914. FO 371/2124 #28966. This is a lengthy and detailed report on Shakespeare's impressions and experiences during his Feb-June, 1914 stay in Arabia and also a valuable insight into the Captain's personal impression of Ibn Saud.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Balkans and defeat at Tripoli had lowered Ottoman power in the eyes of many of her Arab subjects. Shakespeare had remarked on the impact this had on local opinion; "Throughout the country I was struck by the contempt with which the Arabs all regarded the Turkish Government, its troops, and its civil officials."<sup>14</sup>

Shakespeare recommended that in order to create a strong Turkey, the Porte had to be encouraged to change "however unpalatable the process may be". Arabia could no longer be ruled by coercion and the Foreign Office needed to realise that the Turkish Government had "no conception of its own weakness in Arabia".<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare was convinced that the prevailing Turkish policy would "end in disaster" and he hoped that London would undertake a more pro-active policy.<sup>16</sup>

However, it also became apparent that Shakespeare's opinion of Ibn Saud had been influenced by his stay in Najd. In his report Shakespeare claimed that Ibn Saud was a leader who "stands head and shoulders above the rest and in whose star all have implicit faith".<sup>17</sup> If Ottoman policy was not altered it was likely that Ibn Saud would lead a charge for an "independent Arabia"; and rule the peninsula through a confederation of tribes. This would, in all likelihood pave the way for interference from outside powers large and small, throwing the region into turmoil.

Despite Shakespeare's exhortations the Foreign Office had different concerns and would not be rushed into action, choosing instead to proceed cautiously. This was partly due to the terms of the Anglo-Turkish Convention of March, 1914, in which Najd was acknowledged as a *sanjak*

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<sup>14</sup>Notes on Situation in C. Arabia and Bin Saud' report by Captain William Shakespeare to Arthur Hirtzel, Under-secretary, India Office, June 26, 1914, FO 371/2124 #28966.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. Shakespeare believed that the capture of al-Hasa in May 1913 was a feat that Ibn Saud could have achieved as early as 1908 if he had not been involved elsewhere and that the Saudi leader was poised to be a major player in Arabia.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. For more on Arab dissatisfaction with Ottoman rule see also Elizabeth Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, London: Faber and Faber, 1973, pp.47-48 and Bruce Westrate *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920*, University Park: Penn State Press, 1992, pp.12-13.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. Shakespeare also noted that despite the failures of the Porte most Arabian *amirs* would probably still accept Ottoman suzerainty—"so long as it is in name only and does not import meddling in their affairs".



(district) of the Ottoman empire. To deal openly with Ibn Saud, might lead to accusations that Britain was interfering in internal Ottoman matters.<sup>18</sup> The Porte attached great importance to British recognition of Ottoman authority over Najd. Foreign Office officials had already received complaints from suspicious Turkish officials who viewed British relations with Ibn Saud as a conspiracy to divide Ottoman territory.<sup>19</sup> It was possible that such suspicion would lead to an assault on the Najdi ruler in order to curb his ambitions—thus throwing Arabia's political balance into turmoil. To pacify Ottoman concerns, reassurances were given to the Ottoman Minister in London, Hakki Pasha, that British approaches towards Ibn Saud were a matter of political expediency. To ignore him would only antagonise the Najdi ruler and threaten the security of tribes under British protection in the Trucial states.<sup>20</sup>

In fact the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, was not overly concerned about Ibn Saud, believing that the Porte would eventually accept the occupation of al-Hasa as a *fait accompli* and appoint Ibn Saud as an Ottoman official. Grey's imperative was to ensure that peace was maintained in the interim and to discourage hostilities towards Ibn Saud that might lead to further conflict and instability in the region.<sup>21</sup>

Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, did not share this optimism. He saw a danger in a resolution of Ottoman-Saudi differences without British involvement.<sup>22</sup> Negotiations would be better supervised if they took place in London between Hakki Pasha and a Saudi representative. This would allow both Foreign Office and India Office officials to participate in the process. Ibn Saud might even feel more

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<sup>18</sup> Finnie, *Shifting Lines in the Sand*, pp.35-36.

<sup>19</sup> Parker, minute, March 7 1914, PRO FO 371/2123 F#10244/E1/R1, pp.273-274.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Edward Grey (SSFA) to Sir Louis Mallet (Ambassador in Constantinople), March 26, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#13135/R1, p.298. However, it was also indicated that the Porte should not impose conditions on Ibn Saud that would exclude Britain from dealing with him. Grey was reassured by Mallet that a settlement between the Saudi-Ottoman parties would be concluded and it was unlikely hostilities would break out, Sir Louis Mallet to Edward Grey, March 27 1914, FO 371/2123 F#13604/R1, p.302.

<sup>22</sup> India Office to Foreign Office April 4, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#15203/R1, p.313.

indebted to Britain for her intervention. If however, the Najdi ruler was left on his own to strike a deal it was likely the Porte would try to force harsh conditions and ruin any chances for a lasting agreement. A rise in Saudi-Ottoman tensions would only complicate Anglo-Ottoman relations.

Crewe's hopes were dashed when discussions with Hakki Pasha failed to get off the ground.<sup>23</sup> The Porte would now negotiate directly with Ibn Saud. Lord Crewe however, did not give up and insisted that the Sheikh of Kuwait participate so that 'British interests' would be represented. The Foreign Office reassured Crewe that the British position had been communicated to the Porte and that his concerns were groundless. Crewe had no choice but to relent. He gave instructions for the Resident in the Gulf that "Bin Saud may be informed that we have put Porte in possession of our views, and he is free to negotiate direct with the Turks".<sup>24</sup>

There were others who differed with Lord Crewe's views—including Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India.<sup>25</sup> He was among those who opposed any British involvement in Saudi-Ottoman affairs. Supporting Ibn Saud's position, even indirectly, was deemed to risk the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Lord Hardinge believed that Turkey albeit "friendly and reformed", was essential to the security of India:

It is our strong opinion, therefore, that every effort should be made to avoid action likely to lead to the partition, either now or in the future, of Turkey's Asiatic possessions, and that His Majesty's Government should pursue consistently the policy of maintaining the Turkish empire while reforming and strengthening it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Marquess of Crewe, to Government of India, April 7, 1914, FO 371/2123, F#16801E1/R1, p.325

<sup>25</sup> Crewe, as the Secretary of State for India, outranked the Viceroy and could have instructed Hardinge to back his position, but he did not. For further details on the prevalent attitudes of Whitehall ministers see Roger Adelson, *The Formation of British Policy Towards the Middle East: 1914-1918*, Ph.D Thesis, Washington University, 1972, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms.

<sup>26</sup> Viceroy of India to Foreign Office, September 13, 1913, cited in Foreign Office to India Office April 1, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#12320/R1, p.285.



The British Ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Louis Mallet, was also opposed to the position of Lord Crewe.<sup>27</sup> In his estimation, Ibn Saud's control may not be "permanent or indeed more than temporary".<sup>28</sup> Therefore, openly siding with the Najdi ruler was premature.

In a detailed memorandum to the Foreign Office, Mallet called for a reaffirmation of 'traditional' British policy towards Najd which was limited to three concerns. First to "secure to British subjects free access to, and proper treatment in, Najd, and more specifically in the coastal regions." Second, to "avert developments" that hindered British objectives or affected the stability of the region. Third, and most profound was "to prevent or at least postpone anything that might lead to a general Arab outbreak and so endanger the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia".<sup>29</sup>

Mallet urged the Foreign Office to distance itself from "Bin Saood" and any attempts to involve Britain in Saudi negotiations with the Porte. Coming to the aide of an Imperial subject would only fuel speculation of Britain's "hidden agenda". Nor did there appear to be any particular advantage for Britain in having Ibn Saud rule al-Hasa. There was no clear indication that British subjects would receive better treatment at the hands of the Saudi authorities. In any case the Porte had recognised Britain's 'special position in the Gulf'. His Majesty's interests would be far better served if al-Hasa was under Ottoman jurisdiction. Ibn Saud's ascendancy would only facilitate an Arab upheaval and lead to further instability within the Ottoman empire. Mallet urged the Foreign Office to adopt a policy of "refraining from further intervention of any kind for the present".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> SSFI (Crewe) to Viceroy of India (Hardinge), April 23, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#18128/R1, p.355.

<sup>28</sup> Memorandum from Sir Louis Mallet to Sir Edward Grey, entitled 'Relations of His Majesty's Government with Nejd from Turkish View', May 18, 1914 in PRO FO 371/2124 #22042/R1, pp.2-8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Diverging views from the Foreign Office and the Government of India reflected their overlapping and often competing spheres of influence. The failure to comprehend the extent of Ottoman weaknesses, and conflicting departmental views, prevented a unified British policy to emerge. The very policies that Captain Shakespeare advocated to stabilise the Ottoman presence in Arabia were deemed to be an invitation to turmoil. As a result Ibn Saud turned towards the Porte, as he had threatened, in order to 'make his own arrangements'. A meeting was arranged with the Ottoman representative, ~~Najib~~ <sup>al-Naqib</sup> Syed Talib, in the town of Subaihiya, near Kuwait to secure the future of the fledgling Saudi kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

#### Ottoman-Saudi Treaty

Although excluded from the discussions, the Foreign Office was still anxious to know details of the Saudi-Ottoman proceedings. Since Shakespeare was on assignment in Egypt, the Acting Political Agent in Kuwait, Colonel W. Grey, was tasked with gathering information on the progress of the negotiations. Throughout April and May of 1914, Grey gathered intelligence from local Arab sources.<sup>32</sup> Although Ibn Saud was granted free reign in collecting taxes and raising revenue for himself, from quite early on the discussions became strained. The demands by the Porte for the repositioning of garrisons in the towns of Qatif and Uqair as well as the surrender of all canon and artillery guns made Ibn Saud uneasy.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Zirkili, *Shibh al Jazira, fi ahd al Malik Abd al-Aziz*, part 1, pp. 212-214. Also Shamiya, *al-Saud: Madihum wa Mustaqbalhum*, p.109.

<sup>32</sup> Although his reports were culled from various informants Grey cites Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait as his main source. This should indicate that the information received was biased to some degree. Mubarak had developed jealousy and suspicion of Ibn Saud. See Lt. Col.W.Grey, Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident, Gulf, May 6, 1914. FO 371/2124 #26063, pp.63-64 and Political Agent, Kuwait to Political Resident, Gulf, April 2 & April 7, 1914 in FO 371/2123 F#21167, p.402 and p.404.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. The Porte tried to sweeten the deal with a surprising offer to grant verbal, but not written, consent, to enter Qatar and Oman if Ibn Saud so desired. Ibn Saud was unmoved. However, it should be noted that in Grey's reports Mubarak can be seen to play up the references to Qatar and Oman—perhaps to cause the British anxiety and disrupt relations between Britain and his former protégé.



Ibn Saud approached Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait looking for another way forward. He told Mubarak that he sought the same status as Kuwait, "autonomy with British protection under Turkish sovereignty".<sup>34</sup> Mubarak passed on this information to Grey but did not have anything concrete to offer. Ibn Saud too went directly to Grey. He reiterated his reluctance to make an agreement with the Porte.<sup>35</sup> Although uncertain about the veracity of such claims Grey's intelligence sources indicated that Ibn Saud had already sent a letter to Syed Thalib Pasha stating that he could not enter into an agreement.<sup>36</sup>

However, His Majesty's Government had not changed its position. With the Porte refusing British participation, the matter was not pursued. Ibn Saud was dejected at this news. He subsequently asked whether, if he stalled the Porte, His Majesty's Government would come to terms with him at a later date. Grey could not offer any such encouragement. Finally, Ibn Saud asked for Britain to at least guarantee that the Turks would "never be allowed to take hostile action by sea".<sup>37</sup> Again, Grey could offer nothing in the way of commitment. In fact, he said that in light of the circumstance he would not be surprised if Ibn Saud signed an agreement which he knew would cause the British to object.

Indeed on May 29, 1914 Ibn Saud did enter into an agreement with the Porte. In accepting Ottoman suzerainty he retained control over Najd and al-Hasa. Taking the title of *wali* (<sup>Governor</sup> administrator) he was to deal directly with the Interior Ministry in Istanbul bypassing the *wali's* of Basra or Baghdad. As a result of the treaty the Ottoman flag was to be flown at his forts and during time of war he could be asked to field a military force for service in the Ottoman ranks. Ibn Saud lost the right to grant concessions

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Saud to Mubarak cited in Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, April 7 1914, FO 371/2123 F#21167, p.404.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting between Ibn Saud and Colonel Grey on 28 April 1914. Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, April 29 1914, FO 371/2124 F#24823, pp 45-46.

<sup>36</sup> Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, April 29 1914, FO 371/2124 F#24823, pp 45-46.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

or conclude treaties with foreign powers. He was also to channel his foreign policy dealings through the Porte.<sup>38</sup>

Previous authors on this subject have presented differing opinions on the Saudi-Ottoman treaty. John Wilkinson asserts in *Arabia's Frontiers*, that the treaty between Ibn Saud and the Porte was secret and that Britain had no knowledge of it until November 22, 1914 when British troops entered Basra and found the document in Ottoman files.<sup>39</sup> Jacob Goldberg also asserts this in his book *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia 1902-1918*.<sup>40</sup> Robert Lacey, while citing the meetings between Trevor, Shakespeare and Ibn Saud during December 1913, goes on to write that it was not until "two years later...[that] this secret agreement was unearthed."<sup>41</sup> McLoughlin insists that Philby denied the existence of a treaty.<sup>42</sup> Philby, writing in 1952, doubted the existence of the treaty because "the archives of Saudi Arabia have no record of any such formal agreement".<sup>43</sup>

Yet this author's research in Foreign Office records has shown that both Captain Shakespeare and Major Trevor had known about the Treaty and had been shown drafts of the Ottoman proposal by Ibn Saud in 1913. In the words of Trevor: "Bin Saud volunteered to show us in confidence the conditions which had been proposed by the Turkish Government and himself as a basis for the settlement of his future position".<sup>44</sup>

The Agents were shown a document containing "eleven articles, five of which had been suggested by Ibn Saud himself and the other six by the

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<sup>38</sup> Sir Louis Mallet to Edward Grey, June 23, 1914, FO 371/2124 F#28368, p.79. Also Sir Edward Grey to Louis Mallet, July 11, 1914, FO 371/2124F#31123, p.107. For Arabic sources on this agreement see Zirkili, *Shibh al Jazira, fi ahd al Malik Abd al-Aziz*, part 1, pp. 213-214 and Shamiya, *al-Saud: Madihum wa Mustaqbalhum*, pp.109-110. It is interesting to note that these Arabic sources claim Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait participated in the negotiations. Meanwhile according to Colonel Grey, Sheikh Mubarak was not involved and surprised at the conclusion of the Saudi-Ottoman agreement. See Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, June 26 1914, FO 371/2124 F#34347, pp.116-117.

<sup>39</sup>John Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers*, London:I.B. Taurus, 1991, pp.125-130.

<sup>40</sup>Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, Chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup>Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p. 113,

<sup>42</sup>McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud* p.45. It should be noted that Philby did not arrive in Najd until 1917 and was not a first hand witness to these events.

<sup>43</sup>Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup>Major Trevor to Political Resident in the Gulf, December 20, 1913; PRO FO371/2123, F#6117/E4/R1, pp.260-262.



Turkish Government". As a result of their conversations with Ibn Saud Major Trevor concluded that Ibn Saud "would probably accept autonomy under the suzerainty of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan".<sup>45</sup> A Foreign Office memorandum of March 9, 1914, indicates that His Majesty's Government knew in detail the nature of the discussion between the Porte and Ibn Saud.<sup>46</sup> Another confidential telegram from Louis Mallet to Edward Grey sent at the end of March also indicates that it was known that Ibn Saud was in treaty discussion with the Porte.<sup>47</sup> News of the Saudi-Ottoman agreement was also leaked by the father of one of Ibn Saud's wives to the Political Agent Bahrain.<sup>48</sup> As such it cannot be claimed that that Britain was unaware of a treaty between the Porte and Ibn Saud before November 1914. British officials had been intimately aware of the details of the Saudi-Ottoman discussions from at least a year earlier.

Much of the literature about this time is focused on the period following the outbreak of the First World War. Even Philby, who has written much on Saudi Arabia, does not delve deeply into the pre-war tensions between Ibn Saud, the Porte and Britain.<sup>49</sup> The fact that Shakespeare first established his links with Ibn Saud in late 1913 is overshadowed by the attention given to the period after Britain declared war on the Porte in November 1914.<sup>50</sup>

### Outbreak of World War

With the launch of British wartime activities in Mesopotamia and the Gulf, attention turned to bringing Arab rulers into the British war effort. The possibility of using Arab forces to distract Ottoman resources from Europe

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum March 9, 1914 FO 371/2123, F#10569/R1pp. 277-278.

<sup>47</sup> Sir Louis Mallet to Sir Edward Grey, March 31, 1914, FO 371/2123 F#14280/R1, p.305.

<sup>48</sup> Agent Kuwait to Resident Gulf, July 28 1914, FO 371/2124 F#34347, p.119-120

<sup>49</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp. 270-272.

<sup>50</sup> The Declaration of War, signed by King George on November 5, 1914, can be found in PRO 371/2145. The political background leading up to Britain's declaration of war on the Porte has been discussed elsewhere. See Adelson, Roger. 'The Formation of British Policy Towards the Middle East 1914-1918', Ph.D. thesis, Washington University, 1972.

to Arabia brought a renewed interest in Ibn Saud.<sup>51</sup> With support from local rulers Ottoman resources could be diverted to Arabia and this would relieve pressure on British forces elsewhere.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the position of the Najdi ruler would enable him to secure overland communications with Iraq as well as keep in check pro-Ottoman sheikhs on the Gulf coast. It was also important that he did not become an active agent of the Porte.<sup>53</sup>

However, the British official who seemed to know Ibn Saud best was back in England. Captain William Shakespeare had returned home in early 1914 and was busy training new recruits to join the battle in the trenches of Europe. He was quickly reassigned to the Middle East and given the job of bringing Ibn Saud to the Allied side and to "prevent, if possible, the outbreak of unrest in the interior". If war broke out he was to make sure that no aid was given to Turkey.<sup>54</sup>

London's 'Ottoman first' policy makers in the Foreign Office had not changed; they simply saw the usefulness of a central Arabian ally, keeping Ottoman forces engaged in Arabia that would otherwise be used against Allied armies. Shakespeare rejoined Ibn Saud just as campaigns were mounted against the Al-Rashid. Ibn Saud however, would not entertain an alliance with Britain without assurances and guarantees in writing. Shakespeare drew up a draft treaty that would allow the establishment of formal relations. This included a promise of support—provided that Ibn Saud had no relations with other powers without British consent. But Ibn Saud was not impressed at this last minute offer of

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<sup>51</sup>See 'Relations with Ibn Saud' Arab Bureau Report, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251. The new Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener was more interested in Sharif Hussein because of his position in the Hijaz near Ottoman strongholds and the fact that he was Sharif of Mecca and commanded prestige in the Muslim world. See Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, pp.130-133. Zirkili, *Shibh al-Jazira fi ahd al-Malik Abd al Aziz*, pp. 219-220

<sup>52</sup> There was a concern that Ottoman propaganda could incite a *jihad* (holy war) against the British in the Middle East. To counter that possibility it was thought wise to strengthen British relations with Arab rulers. See Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs: 1914-1921*, p.8.

<sup>53</sup> Silverfarb, Daniel, 'The Anglo-Najd Treaty of 1915', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No.3, Oct.1980. See also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>54</sup>'Relations with Ibn Saud', Arab Bureau Report, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251. See also Winstone, *Captain Shakespeare*, pp.193-194. According to George Antonius,



assistance and was unsure of the seriousness with which the offer was made. An alliance had already been agreed with the Porte and Ibn Saud was wary of taking this uncertain offer of British friendship.

Despite the lack of agreement, Shakespeare remained with Ibn Saud as an observer.<sup>55</sup> Though he was reputed to be the most travelled official in Arabia at the time and an expert on the tribes of central and eastern Arabia, it is not clear how well Shakespeare understood the people he was reported to know. A case in point was his belief that it was possible for the various political and tribal interests in the Arabian peninsula to be unified—in a “confederation or alliance”. This group would consist of Ibn Saud, Imam Yahya and Sheikh Idriss of Yemen, Sharif Hussein of Mecca and ibn Sha’alan of the northwest Hijaz. It is surprising that such a well-travelled official could actually believe that such an alliance could be created. A Foreign Office official who reviewed the Captain's report commented that despite Shakespeare’s reputed “experience and authority” on Arabian matters, the official was sceptical that any such union could conceivably take place.<sup>56</sup>

It was clear that the Captain admired Ibn Saud. But he did not know any other beduin chief nearly as well. His relationships with other Arab leaders were not as extensive nor as personal. Shakespeare was made to believe that he was privy to Ibn Saud’s deepest thoughts and concerns. Indeed the Saudi ruler revealed to him confidential correspondence with the Porte and other Arab rulers. In time, the Captain came to identify the objectives of British foreign policy with the success of Ibn Saud and requiring the overhaul of Ottoman policies in Arabia.<sup>57</sup>

Even though for much of the his stay in Arabia, Britain rarely if ever came through with Ibn Saud’s requests, the relationship between the two men endured. Shakespeare was one of the few ‘foreigners’ who had earned

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Shakespeare was sent "to try and secure his [Ibn Saud's] cooperation in the cause of the Allies". Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.40.

<sup>56</sup>See handwritten minutes of Foreign Office officials attached to the dispatch of Shakespeare to Hirtzel, 26 June 1914, FO 371/2124 #28966, p.80.

his way into the close circle around the Saudi *amir*. He travelled, ate and joked with Ibn Saud and his men; proffering advice, information and understanding about the outside world, particularly Europe.<sup>58</sup> Often after the end of a meal, the Captain was asked to stay behind, along with Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, the *amir*'s cousin, and the three of them would discuss the most pressing issues in private. Yet there was another side to this closeness as well. By taking Shakespeare into confidence Ibn Saud hoped to gain Shakespeare's trust, and through him Britain's respect and assistance. Ibn Saud once remarked in friendly exuberance "my trust is first in God and then you, O Shakespeare".<sup>59</sup>

In return, Shakespeare held Ibn Saud in high regard. The Najdi ruler was praised for his hospitality and openness—which was deemed to indicate the respect with which Ibn Saud held Britain. Shakespeare hoped that his superiors would provide assistance to Najd and thus see British policy objectives achieved. In the Captain's assessment Ibn Saud simply sought the right to rule his ancestral lands, to be left alone and administer Islamic law "in the old time honoured way". If fully recognised as the ruler of Najd, Shakespeare was sure of Ibn Saud's contentment, seeing in him no desire to become Caliph or ruler of Arabia. The Captain assured His Majesty's Government that: "I do not think that he (Ibn Saud) would ever embark on a campaign to set himself up as Sultan of all Arabia".<sup>60</sup>

Robert Lacey argues that Shakespeare and Ibn Saud had the "makings of a fine team", one that could have gone on to greater conquests for Britain.<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare's own understanding of Arabia seems to have been influenced by his perception of the nobility of desert life which stood in marked contrast to the opulence and corrupt intrigue in the Ottoman court. Ibn Saud's desire to re-claim his hereditary rights seemed perfectly respectable and legitimate goals to the English Captain. Shakespeare's

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<sup>57</sup> Shakespeare to Hirtzel, 26 June 1914, FO 371/2124 #28966, pp.80-82.

<sup>58</sup> Born on October 29, 1878 Shakespeare was also around the same age as Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud whose year of birth has been variously stated as between 1876 to 1880.

<sup>59</sup> Comment by Ibn Saud cited in Winstone, *Captain Shakespeare* pp. 20-21.

<sup>60</sup> Shakespeare to Hirtzel, June 27, 1914, PRO FO 371/2124 #28966.



assessment of Ottoman military deficiency and his estimate of the need for at least two divisions to maintain order in central Arabia was perhaps more accurate than his assertion that Ibn Saud did not have large territorial ambitions. However, the durability of the relationship between the two men could not be tested. Shakespeare was killed at Jarrab in January 1915 during a battle between Ibn Saud's forces and the Al-Rashid.<sup>62</sup>

Several authors have noted the closeness of the British agent and the Najdi ruler—making the point that no other British official was as trusted by Ibn Saud as Shakespeare and none was sent to replace him. Philby noted that after the death of Shakespeare, Najdi forces largely withdrew from open engagements and that Ibn Saud "was left to sulk in his tents, while developments in other parts of Arabia reduced him to a position of relative insignificance as a factor in Arabian politics".<sup>63</sup> According to Gilbert Clayton, this retreat was seen as a sign of weakness. Ibn Saud was accused of having "abandoned all attempts to support the Allied campaign against the Turks".<sup>64</sup> However, later in this chapter it will be shown that in fact Ibn Saud maintained an active role and that British officials were still keen to maintain the relationship.

The period following Shakespeare's death was extremely challenging. The Ajman tribesman, who had cost Ibn Saud the battle of Jarrab, joined forces with the al-Murrah and with cousins of Ibn Saud (the same group that rebelled against him in 1910) in open revolt, casting al-

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<sup>61</sup> Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.118

<sup>62</sup> Shakespeare was killed when supposed allies of Ibn Saud, the Ajman tribe, abandoned their positions. This exposed a vulnerable flank to the attacking Al-Rashid. Readily distinguishable in his English Captain's uniform, Shakespeare was an easy target. The Ajman were a weak link. Though at one time supporters of Ibn Saud, since the take over of al-Hasa in 1913 there were many discontented elements among the tribe. Heavy taxes were levied upon them and they had been prohibited from extracting tolls from passing caravans as had been their custom. The Ajman's rocky relationship with Ibn Saud is detailed by A.S. Al-Uthaiymeen, in *Tarikh al-Mamlakah al-Arabiya al-Suudiyyah*, (the History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) Vol.II, Riyadh: Dar al-Obaykan, 1416 (1996), p.151. Also Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.271-272. Robert Lacey provides details of Shakespeare's death, based on interviews conducted in 1979, with survivors of the battle. See Lacey, *The Kingdom*, pp.116-117.

<sup>63</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.272. Although Philby himself later noted that Ibn Saud "lost no time in asking for the appointment of another officer to take Shakespeare's place", Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.41-42.



Hasa once again into turmoil.<sup>65</sup> This succeeded in placing a severe strain on the resources and energy of Ibn Saud. Despite the death of Shakespeare, Percy Cox, still felt it necessary to pursue an agreement with Ibn Saud. He arranged to meet Ibn Saud himself in December 1915 at the port of Darin.

#### Anglo-Saudi Alliance: The 1915 Treaty of Darin

Percy Cox met with Ibn Saud at Darin on the island of Tarut in the Gulf, on 26 December, 1915.<sup>66</sup> Cox had specific concerns over the type of British guarantees that Ibn Saud would request—particularly in the long term. There was also uncertainty over the durability of the Saudi dynasty. With the ever-changing political situation in Arabia, Cox could not allow Britain to become committed to defending any existing and future territory that Ibn Saud might claim as his. Although neighbouring Kuwait and Bahrain had long established their independence, along the rest of the Gulf coast things were not as clear. Defining the exact demarcations of Saudi territory would take some negotiation and was unlikely to be reached quickly.

Ibn Saud for his part, hoped for an indication of Britain's level of commitment to his protection. More specifically, he desired Britain to recognise territories that he hoped to include in his empire in the future—territory that he intended to capture by force. He did not wish to be limited to a static area that was imposed upon him. Ironically, this led to a situation where neither Cox nor Ibn Saud desired a final border settlement. In the end, Britain simply chose to acknowledge those territories which Ibn Saud held at the time; Najd, al-Hasa, Qatif and Jubail. The issue of other areas which Ibn Saud hoped to include would be resolved later. Thus Article I of the Treaty of Darin stated:

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<sup>64</sup>Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.23

<sup>65</sup> Though this was partly a response to the harsh rule of the *amir* of the province, Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, and partly the anger of local chiefs at having to relinquish their authority to the ever expanding Saudi polity. 'Relations with Ibn Saud' Arab Bureau Report, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251.

<sup>66</sup> Report on Anglo-Saudi Treaty, December 26, 1915, PRO FO 371/2769 #38086. For Saudi perspective see Zirkili, *Shibh al-Jazira fi ahd al-Malik Abd al Aziz*, p.285.



The British Government do acknowledge and admit that Najd, Al-Hasa, Qatif and Jubail, and their dependencies and territories, which will be discussed and determined hereafter and their ports on the shores of the Persian Gulf are the countries of Bin Saud and of his fathers before him, and do hereby recognise the said Bin Saud as the independent Ruler thereof and absolute chief of their tribes, and after him his son and descendants by inheritance; but the selection of the individual shall be in accordance with the nomination (i.e., by the living Ruler) of his successor; but with the proviso that he shall not be a person antagonistic to the British Government in any respect.<sup>67</sup>

However, this was not the most contentious issue. Article II of the treaty created more difficulty. Britain wanted to come to Saudi aid only if there was an unprovoked attack by a foreign power—which was intended to mean other European powers. However, Ibn Saud, sought a more liberal definition of 'foreign power' to include his local rivals like Sharif Hussein. Cox would not agree. Since there was no third party to the Treaty of Darin—they could interpret it in their own way. Indeed Britain could claim that it would respond in the manner it "may consider most effective".

Furthermore, Cox was determined to restrict Ibn Saud's encroachment upon his neighbours in the Gulf. Article VI specifically prohibited Ibn Saud from "aggression on, or interference with, the territories of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman Coast, or other tribes and Chiefs who are under the protection of the British Government, and the limits of whose territories shall be hereafter determined".<sup>68</sup> This only served to annoy Ibn Saud who regarded many of the Trucial chiefs as rulers of mere towns not sovereigns of separate political entities. In fact Ibn Saud suggested an alternative wording to reflect his views. He claimed a great part of the eastern shores of the Gulf on the basis of ancestral rule. By changing the wording to deny the existence of fixed territories Ibn Saud could at least satisfy his own feelings that the importance of Gulf rulers was diminished.

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<sup>67</sup>Article I, Anglo-Saudi Treaty of Darin, December 26, 1915, in PRO FO 371/2769 #38086.

Cox agreed to the alteration of Article VI which stated that Ibn Saud was prohibited from "all aggression on, or interference with, the territories of Kuwait, Bahrain and of the Sheikhs of Qatar and Oman Coast, who are under the protection of the British Government and the limits of their territories shall be hereafter determined."<sup>69</sup> The changes prohibited attacks on individual rulers without forcing Ibn Saud to concede any claims to Qatar or Oman. On the issue of succession, Ibn Saud stated that he would either appoint a successor himself or have a semi-public selection process. Cox preferred an inherited kingship which would reduce the unpredictability of an elected leader.<sup>70</sup> No doubt Ibn Saud appreciated this decision since it guaranteed his sons a role in future power.

The agreement with Great Britain provided Ibn Saud with some insurance against an Ottoman attack. But also he also required financial and material aid in order to repel the Ottoman-backed forces of the Al-Rashid. With Rashidi encouragement the Ajman had stepped up their attacks on Saudi forces. Under the terms of the Treaty of Darin Ibn Saud was to be loaned £20,000 and receive 1000 rifles and 200,000 rounds of ammunition. The arms were put to immediate use and throughout the winter of 1915-1916 clashes with the Al-Rashid and Ajman were fierce. At one point Ibn Saud was himself wounded, which Cox reported as a "slight flesh wound". But in the same battle Ibn Saud lost his full brother, Sa'ad who was younger than him.<sup>71</sup> To complicate matters further, relations with Kuwait worsened following the death of his old mentor, Mubarak al-Sabah in December 1915. The new ruler gave refuge to the rebellious Ajman and refused to expel them when asked to do so by Ibn Saud.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Draft of Article VI of Anglo-Saudi Treaty, cited in Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers*, p.138.

<sup>69</sup>Final version of Article VI, Anglo Saudi Treaty, in PRO FO 371/2769 #38086

<sup>70</sup>Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, January 10, 1916, PRO FO 371/2769 #41504.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid. Cox also showed the concern that British officials had over attitudes of Arabian chieftains towards the Caliphate issue. He confidently reported that in Arabia "the question of the Caliphate has no serious interest for the tribes or their chiefs".

<sup>72</sup>Though it would have been against desert tradition to force out those that had sought protection, mistrust and envy fuelled the decision to allow the Ajman to remain in Kuwait. See Abu-Hakima, *The Modern History of Kuwait: 1750-1965*, pp.132-133. Although Abu



### British Intelligence and Ibn Saud

The revolt of the Ajman and the successes of the Al-Rashid raised concerns about the permanence of Ibn Saud's regime. The War Office, in particular, wished to evaluate the usefulness of Ibn Saud in the war effort. John Keyes, a Military Intelligence officer, was sent to report on the Najdi ruler. As with Shakespeare and Cox before him Keyes was impressed by Ibn Saud's "loathing of the Turk" and his intense "patriotism" which drove his conquests. Keyes was quick to realise that it was the anti-Ottoman sentiment that was "the only cause of his having anything to do with us".<sup>73</sup>

Keyes spent a much shorter period with Ibn Saud than Shakespeare and was not particularly impressed by the reported skills of Saudi forces:

I don't think he [Ibn Saud] has much power of military organisation or much capacity in the field. His tribesmen are a ruly independent lot; and in both his recent defeats, being the party of law and order, their hearts were not in it, while the enemy on both occasions had their women with them, which, with Arabs means that they were all out.<sup>74</sup>

This was in marked contrast to the favourable reports Shakespeare used to send to London. Keyes was sceptical of Ibn Saud's supposed great leadership and military skill. In reports Keyes obtained from local sources little stock was given to the Najdi dynasty.<sup>75</sup>

In direct meetings with Ibn Saud, Keyes found the *amir* a man of "extraordinary patience and kindness". But he did not let the *amir's* charm and hospitality alter his analysis. Keyes realised that Ibn Saud "would play the game with us" because it was only with British help that Ottoman

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Hakima claims that it was Salim al-Sabah that granted the Ajman refuge it was actually Jabir, the elder son, who did so. See also Al-Uthaiymeen, *Tarikh al-Mamlakah al-Arabiya alSuudiyyah*, Vol.II, p. 152. The general situation around the 1915 Treaty is discussed in Silverfarb, 'The Anglo-Najd Treaty of 1915', p.152.

<sup>73</sup> Report of Director of Military Intelligence, in War Office to Foreign Office, January 10, 1916, PRO FO 371/2769 #38981; includes report from J. Keyes to Lt. Colonel Mark Sykes of Military Intelligence.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Report of Director of Military Intelligence, in War Office to Foreign Office, January 10, 1916, PRO FO 371/2769 #38981; includes report from J. Keyes to Lt. Colonel Mark Sykes of Military Intelligence.

domination could be ended. The fact was not lost upon the British officer that if it became beneficial to the *amir's* interest to discard his relations with Britain he would do so. While Keyes saw the tactic of "flirting with the Sharif and punching Bin Rashid wherever he can get at him" as understandable, he plainly did not consider Ibn Saud a great leader in the same vein as Najdi rulers of years past. Keyes was one of the rare British officials who travelled through Arabia who did not let the hospitality of Ibn Saud deflect his ability to criticise Saudi capabilities. He differentiated between the charming and sociable host and the rag tag capabilities of the loosely knit fighting forces at the *amir's* disposal.<sup>76</sup>

Keyes' reports were important in reinforcing the view that Hussein was the one to back, and that other Arab leaders, despite being lively characters, were small time operators, involved in tribal squabbles and alliances of convenience. Only Hussein was viewed as having the religious pedigree and the military capability to offer significant assistance to the war effort. Ibn Saud was the leader of a small sect of puritans with limited appeal in the wider Muslim world.<sup>77</sup>

While Keyes gathered reports for London on his Arabian travels, Percy Cox did the same for his immediate superior, General Maude, the British Army Commander for Mesopotamia. Cox had to procure interpreters and informers, debrief spies and interview prisoners. The time Cox spent in meetings with tribal chiefs and notables was for the purpose of gathering intelligence on, and understanding of, local rivalries and tribal histories. This latter role was extremely important to British interests, as there was an acknowledged lack of understanding about such matters.<sup>78</sup> With his energies strained Cox sent a request in July 1916, to the Foreign

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> There were differences of opinion among officials as to who was the more useful leader for British interests. FO and Egyptian Govt. officials felt that Hussein had the better lineage and prestige, while Ibn Saud was considered to be lower in nobility and influence. To Indian officials Ibn Saud was a threat to the Gulf coast and Iraqi security and had to be dealt with. But they believed it prudent to steer clear of Hijazi politics and not upset Muslim subjects. See Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East: 1914-1971*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1981, pp.33-35 and Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, p. 116.

<sup>78</sup> Graves, *Life of Sir Percy Cox*, p.225.



Department of the Government of India, to dispatch an assistant who could also function as a temporary financial officer. The man who was to be sent was Harry St. John Philby.

The attempts that were being made by Keyes, Cox and other British Government officials to assess the role leaders such as Ibn Saud could play in the war effort, were partly the result of pressure mounted following the fateful campaigns in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia. It was hoped that involving Arab rulers would divert Ottoman resources away from British lines as well as maintain stability in Arabia by playing off Arab chiefs against each other. Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt entered into correspondence with Sharif Hussein of Mecca between July 1915 and February 1916 in order to obtain the latter's co-operation in the fight against the 'Turks'. Hussein was manoeuvring to obtain his own independence and unlike Ibn Saud had openly declared an interest in being the ruler of all Arabs.

McMahon however, did not wish to be too specific about British support for Hussein after the war. Negotiations with France about the nature of Anglo-French co-operation were ongoing and there was no desire to prejudice those discussions by making early promises to Hussein. At the same time, there was a military need for a diversion in Arabia to take pressure off soldiers in Gallipoli. McMahon gave pledges of British support for Hussein in return for his assistance in the fight against Istanbul. Yet since that time there has been controversy over the nature of those assurances and interpretations of McMahon's letters.<sup>79</sup> However it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in the discussion of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Matters were complicated, argues Lawrence Graffety-Smith, because the original Arabic version of one of McMahon's most controversial letters to Hussein could not be found in either Cairo or Jeddah making it difficult to disabuse the Sharif's misinterpretations at the time. See McMahon-Hussein letter of October 24, 1915, cited and commented on by Lawrence Graffety-Smith. At the time the 24 year old Graffety-Smith was a newly appointed official at the British Agency in Jeddah. See Lawrence Graffety-Smith, *Bright Levant*, London: John Murray, 1970, pp.154-156.

<sup>80</sup> This author has only briefly touched on the correspondence but for a more in depth study see Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence*

In any case, no official agreement between McMahon and Hussein occurred. This did not prevent the Sharif from having grandiose ambitions and dreams of becoming ruler of all the Arabs—with British help. Indeed financial and material encouragement came from the Foreign Office and the 'Arab Bureau' based in Cairo.<sup>81</sup> However, McMahon's deputy Ronald Storrs did not believe Hussein exerted as much influence in the Arab world as the Sharif thought. *Who in North Africa, Egypt, Yemen or Eastern Arabia would recognise Hussein as their 'king'—let alone as leader of all the Arabs?*<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, British officials in Egypt with encouragement from London felt they had to support Hussein as much as possible. When they started in November 1914 it could not have been realised how much money, and weaponry, or how many promises would have to be poured into Hussein's cause.

In June 1916 Hussein organised an uprising against the Ottoman administration—that came to be called the 'Great Arab Revolt'.<sup>83</sup> Having

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*and its Interpretations 1914-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976. Also Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, especially Chapter 9; and Isaiah Friedman, *Palestine: A Twice Promised Land?*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> The purpose of the Bureau was to gather and analyse intelligence on the Arabs and to keep the various British agencies "simultaneously informed on the general tendency of German and Turkish policy" regarding the region, 'Report of Committee of Imperial Defence', January 7, 1916, PRO FO 882/2, ARB/16/4, cited by Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, p.31, fn 42.

<sup>82</sup> Storrs wrote: "When in addition we reflected that 90 per cent of the Moslem World must call Husain a renegade and traitor to the Vicar of God we could not conceal from ourselves (and with difficulty from him) that his pretensions bordered upon the tragi-comic." Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs*, New York: G.P. Putnam, 1937, p.168. This is the American version of his famed book *Orientalism*. Storrs also commented on the problems of translations and language: "Our Arabic correspondence with Mecca was prepared by Ruhi, a fair though not profound Arabist (and a better agent than scholar); and checked, often under high pressure by myself. I had no Deputy, Staff or office, so that during my absence on mission the work was carried on (better perhaps) by others but the continuity was lost. Husain's letters on the other hand were written in an obscure and tortuous prose in which the purity of the Hejaz Arabic was overlaid and tainted with Turkish idioms and syntax". Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs*, p. 168.

<sup>83</sup> Many works already cover in detail the ambitions and motivations behind Hussein's 'Arab Revolt' of 1916; See Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand: the Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East 1789-1923*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, especially chapter 13; Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, 'Myth in the Desert, or Not the Great Arab Revolt' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.33, no.2, (April 1997), pp.267-312; and Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, p.35. Also Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1962, pp.34-53; Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1990, p.21; George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, pp.184-200; Winstone, *The Illicit*



successfully taken over Mecca, he was unable to project his power beyond the city. Ottoman forces were quickly reinforced through the Damascus-Medina railway. The speed of the Ottoman reaction threatened to end Hussein's challenge. The Arab Bureau Chief, David Hogarth, was forced to plough more supplies and money into Hussein's venture. Hogarth's protégé the famous T.E. Lawrence helped train the Hijazi rebels to fight an irregular war against Ottoman forces—a strategy that went against the tactics traditionally used by British forces. Using money, gold and weapons Lawrence was able to entice, cajole and purchase beduin loyalties.

At the same time Hogarth did not want Hussein to become too powerful. It was important to maintain a balance of power in Arabia between Hussein, Ibn Saud and the Al-Rashid. Hogarth preferred to see each leader "in such a position as to have a wholesome respect for the other".<sup>84</sup> For the essence of controlling Arabia was to prevent the coming together of the various Arab leaders against Britain. This was also the view of Hogarth's superior, Sir Reginald Wingate, the Governor-General of the Sudan. Wingate was keen to channel all support to Hussein and avoid providing any encouragement to Ibn Saud.<sup>85</sup> He also believed British interests were best served by preserving Hussein as the custodian of the Hijaz and the holy cities.

This was seemingly consistent with the policy advocated by the Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe:

What we want is not a United Arabia; but a weak and disunited Arabia, split up into little principalities so far as

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*Adventure*, pp. 256-268; Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*, pp.31-37 and Storrs, *Memoirs of Ronald Storrs*, pp.177-201. For an Ottoman perspective on the Revolt and Turkish-Hijaz relations see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1997, pp. 196-200.

<sup>84</sup> Hogarth note, December 31, 1917, PRO FO 882/8. IS/17/34, in *Westrate Arab Bureau*, p.119

<sup>85</sup>Report of Reginald Wingate to FO, December 28, 1917, PRO, FO/371/3056/244770/99430. Wingate believed that Ibn Saud exaggerated the threat posed by the Al-Rashid. Not only had Wingate supported Hussein and his revolt but he also looked for other supporters against the Ottomans. Major Reilly was dispatched to the region of Asir in southern Arabia with £25,000 to entice the local ruler Sheikh Idriss to join the revolt against the Turks. See 'Report of Major Reilly Visit to Sheikh Idriss, PRO FO 371/3056/238536.

possible under our suzerainty — but incapable of coordinated action against us, forming a buffer against powers in the west.<sup>86</sup>

However, the Indian Government was deeply disturbed by the cavalier attitude with which the Arab Bureau (backed by the Foreign Office) conducted Arabian policy. Cairo officials seemed to have no regard for the adverse effects of its policies on Indian political interests. The encouragement of Hussein to revolt against his Muslim suzerain would only cause hostility and suspicion among the millions of Muslim subjects in India. Massive unrest in the towns and villages could result. The Indian Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, was concerned that Arab Bureau support for Sharif Hussein would be detrimental to the morale and affect the loyalty of Muslim troops serving in the British Indian Army.<sup>87</sup>

This tension between Indian and Egyptian officials was due to the absence of co-ordinated policy among various British administrations and the lack of information sharing. Officials in Cairo did not realise the extent of support India was giving to Ibn Saud nor did they consider the effects of Hijaz-Najd conflict on British interests in the Persian Gulf. Ronald Storrs noted that:

So far as we were concerned it seemed to be nobody's business to harmonise the various views and policies of the Foreign Office, the India Office, the Admiralty, the War Office, the Government of India and the Residency in Egypt.<sup>88</sup>

Ibn Saud meanwhile saw British support for Hussein's revolt as prejudicing his own position, and felt that Britain might expect him to submit to the Sharif's authority in future. He had spent much energy in putting down his own revolt of the Ajman tribe. Now, he sought clarification from Cox as to his position in relation to the British

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<sup>86</sup> Crewe private telegram to Hardinge, Viceroy of India, November 12, 1914, cited in Busch *Britain, India and the Arabs: 1914-1921*, p.62.

<sup>87</sup>Chelmsford succeeded Hardinge as Viceroy of India in 1916, see Graves, *Life of Percy Cox*, p.205. and Westrate *The Arab Bureau*, pp. 80-81,117.



Government. A meeting was arranged for the two in November in the port town of Uqair. The *amir* explained to Cox the strain on his resources and that the trade of his people had suffered as a result of fighting the Al-Rashid. Although Cox gave assurances of British support he could not give him honest advice. Cox hoped Ibn Saud would be more active in battle so that his superiors would be convinced of the Saudi leaders' value. He could not encourage this because the Government of India was averse to financing Ibn Saud's adventures nor did they want to encourage the Saudi leader out of fear of him making aggressive moves on Hejaz. Also Hogarth and Wingate at the Arab Bureau had philosophical aversions to Wahhabism and did not want to see it spread.<sup>89</sup>

Cox attempted to placate the *amir* by presenting him with the order of the Knights Cross of the Indian Empire (KCIE). It seemed to have the desired effect since in his speech after receiving the award, Ibn Saud praised Britain for trying to unite the Arabs and denounced the Porte for its efforts to weaken and divide. He even managed to pay tribute to Sharif Hussein for his part in the fight against the Ottoman oppressors. Ibn Saud's final act was to pledge to cooperate with the Allied war effort.<sup>90</sup>

#### Harry St. John Philby

By late 1917, the British position in the war was uncertain. Russia had undergone great internal change that year with the overthrow of the czar and the Bolshevik revolution, which made her commitment to the war precarious. The Arab revolt had not been a resounding success, the Ottomans were still in Medina and relations between Ibn Saud and Hussein were at a stage which could lead to hostilities breaking out. The request Cox had made for an assistant brought Harry St. John Philby to the

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<sup>88</sup> Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs*, p.168.

<sup>89</sup> 'Relations with Ibn Saud' Arab Bureau Report, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251.

<sup>90</sup> See Graves, *Life of Percy Cox*, pp. 213-214; Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, p.118-119; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p. 245.

Gulf. Cox entrusted Philby to lead a mission to Ibn Saud in order to encourage the *amir* to take a more active role against Ibn Rashid.<sup>91</sup>

The meeting between these two men was to start a relationship that would span three decades. Cambridge educated Philby had, according to Howarth, a "heightened sense of his own opinion".<sup>92</sup> Indeed Philby quarrelled furiously with superiors and subordinates alike (his disagreement with his deputy, Colonel Hamilton, was so great that the latter left Riyadh within a week after arrival). Yet Philby had developed a deep interest in the Saudi *amir*. Whether it was Ibn Saud's personality, or beduin hospitality, Philby believed he had found a far more capable leader and one who was more connected to his people, than Sharif Hussein. Philby also found great interest in the genealogy of tribes, particularly of the Al-Saud family. He spent hours with the *amir*, learning about the exploits of Saudi predecessors and the history of the Arabian peninsula.<sup>93</sup>

This was the beginning of Philby's indulgence in his personal interests which often came at the expense of his instructions from Cox—instructions that called for action. It was important at that stage in the war for Ibn Rashid to be distracted from the right flank of Lawrence and the troops of Hussein who were fighting their way up the Hijaz. The Al-Rashid had been a nuisance in Mesopotamia and were involved in the smuggling of arms into Ottoman territory, reducing the effectiveness of the British blockade. Philby was instructed to offer Ibn Saud £20,000 to purchase camels, 1,000 rifles and four field guns so that an assault could be launched on Hail, the Rashidi capital.<sup>94</sup>

The final deal was to be negotiated by Sir Ronald Storrs who was to journey to Riyadh from Hijaz.<sup>95</sup> Sharif Hussein however, not wishing to see

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<sup>91</sup>The experiences were later published by Philby as, *Heart of Arabia*, Vols. 1&2, London: Constable & Co. 1922, and also Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, London: Frank Cass 1977.

<sup>92</sup>Howarth, *The Desert King*, p. 102. Also McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.54

<sup>93</sup> Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, London: Faber and Faber, 1973.

<sup>94</sup> 'Relations with Ibn Saud', Arab Bureau Report, January 12, 1917, IOR L/P&S/18/B251. See also Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs: 1914-1921*, pp. 250-255.

<sup>95</sup> Storrs was to be appointed as the replacement for the deceased Captain Shakespeare. He had already tried to take up the post in May but had suffered heatstroke and was forced to turn back. Storrs returned to England and offered to make the trip again in October



any benefits go to his Saudi rival, refused to let Storrs go, claiming that he could not guaranty safety from the 'Wahhabi' fanatics of Ibn Saud.<sup>96</sup> It was another attempt to frustrate British attempts to get Ibn Saud more involved in the war effort. Philby saw this as an opportunity to explore the desert interior of Arabia for himself and to make a historic trip from one end of the Arabian peninsula to the other.

He managed to convince Ibn Saud that he should be allowed to venture to Hijaz and bring back Storrs, proving the Sharif wrong. However, Philby was leaving Riyadh with a vital agreement between Britain and Ibn Saud unsigned. With escorts provided by the *amir*, Philby reached the Hijaz without incident. His safe arrival humiliated the Sharif. Incensed, Hussein forbade Philby, let alone Storrs, from returning via the desert. This forced Philby to take a long fortuitous route by ship first to Cairo then all the way to Bombay where he had to travel back to the Gulf and then overland to Riyadh. It was a journey that took more than four months to complete.

Philby's absence meant that Riyadh was without a British official to conclude the agreement with Ibn Saud. Cox and the Indian Government had been observing the direction of Hijazi campaigns and had not followed up with Ibn Saud. They did not send anyone to Riyadh in Philby's absence. Meanwhile Hussein's forces had achieved successes in their campaign's in northern Hijaz, proving that Ibn Saud was neither needed nor effective.<sup>97</sup> The offer of money and guns for Najd was withdrawn, much to the embarrassment of Philby and to the anger of Ibn Saud. Contemplating an

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because no appointment had yet been made to the court of Ibn Saud, but he was not sent. Correspondence between Cox and the SSI regarding this period can be found in IOR L/P&S/10/2182. Also Busch *Britain, India and the Arabs: 1914-1921*, p. 248.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.261. Philby's self righteousness annoyed officials at the Arab Bureau like Hogarth and Wingate and in return Philby disliked the Arab Bureau for he saw them as inimical to the interests of Ibn Saud, Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, pp.120-121.

<sup>97</sup> Minutes of Middle East Committee, January 19 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B280/P337

offensive against Hussein, Ibn Saud was restrained by Philby who sent the *amir* some gold to deter an assault on Hijaz.<sup>98</sup>

Meanwhile, in London, Sharif Hussein had emerged with a positive record of supporting the Allies, while Ibn Saud appeared uncommitted and less important to British objectives:

As between Hussein and Saud, the choice for our military policy is simple, and our greatest effort must be to support the Sherif .....Ibn Saud on the other hand has secured us little definite military advantage beyond the moral influence of his alliance.<sup>99</sup>

It was sentiments such as these that boosted Hussein's hopes for obtaining independence and an empire of his own. This was much to the annoyance of the Government of India, which was concerned that the promotion of Arab nationalism by the Arab Bureau would inspire similar desires among its Indian Muslim subjects.<sup>100</sup>

However as the outcome of the war appeared to favour the Allies the future of the Arabs was being decided in Europe. British negotiations with France and Russia were well underway to create mandates in the territories taken from Ottoman control. Both Lawrence in the west, and Cox, in the east were occupied by the regional considerations of their respective departments and would not have been aware of the deals being arranged at the time. In fact Cox was not informed of the Sykes-Picot agreement until almost a year later, despite the fact that it would directly affect his position as Chief Political Officer in Basra.<sup>101</sup>

### The Ikhwan and Sharif Hussein

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<sup>98</sup>'Report of Philby Mission to Bin Saud', Philby to Political Agent, Baghdad, December 9, 1917, IOR R/15/2/38. Philby used gold from a special allotment that he had at his discretion, Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.104.

<sup>99</sup>'Report on Ibn Saud', War Office, January 21, 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B270/P337.

<sup>100</sup>Fierce disagreements raged within the Arab Bureau as well as between Bureau and the Indian Government. Philby was a major annoyance to all because he refused to bring Ibn Saud into line with what Hogarth wanted, which was to prevent attacks on the Al-Rashid of Hail. Ironically Hogarth wanted to keep the Al-Rashid as counter-weights to both Ibn Saud and Hussein, so that no one leader would become all powerful. For further discussion of these points see Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, pp.123-133.



Sharif Hussein ruled with a firm, autocratic hand. A workaholic even in his seventies, Hussein was unwilling to admit that he could not achieve everything he set out to do. Practicality was secondary to the satisfaction of his whims.<sup>102</sup> He taxed pilgrim visitors excessively and though responsible for their safety left them to be fleeced further by local merchants and tribesmen. Hussein ran kickback scams at the medical clinics treating pilgrims and at one time decided to change the entire currency system overnight, replacing the Ottoman currency with his own coinage, which was diluted metal, and threatened to hang anyone who complained.<sup>103</sup> He tried to starve the local beduin into obedience rather than pay out vast subsidies by passing a law that prohibited the export of more than six bushels of grain from the towns to the countryside on any one day. This was far less than the minimum required for daily consumption by the tribes and settlements outside the town walls.<sup>104</sup>

Paranoid about dissent, Hussein had spies throughout Jeddah and Mecca. He brought great distress to foreign consuls by his flippant treatment of treaties and agreements—not hesitating to abrogate parts that he suddenly found unsuitable. He was “damnably despotic”. In describing Hussein’s personality Reader Bullard, the British consul called him:

a cunning, lying, credulous, suspicious, obstinate, vain, conceited, ignorant, greedy, cruel Arab sheikh suddenly thrust into a position where he has to deal with all sorts of questions he doesn’t understand and where there is no power to restrain him, and you have a picture of King Hussein.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*, p.36.

<sup>102</sup> For more on the personality of Hussein see Randall Baker, *King Hussein and the Kingdom of Hejaz*. New York: Oleander Press, 1979.

<sup>103</sup> Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.11 & pp. 43-45.

<sup>104</sup> Bullard, Letter of November 18, 1923 cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.24.

<sup>105</sup> Bullard to Andrew Ryan, Levant Consular Service, 5 October 1923, Bullard Papers, St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, Box VI, File 5, cited in Lacey *The Kingdom*, p.182. However, this letter was not included in the compilation of Bullard correspondence, official and private, published in *Two Kings in Arabia*. One reason may have been the belief of the editor, E.C. Hodgkin, that such candid views were part of Bullard’s personal attempts to “let off steam” given the harsh conditions and many frustrations faced in Jeddah. Thus Hodgkin did not retain some of the more colourful language used by Bullard to describe certain events involving Sharif Hussain when “on occasions the steam did come near boiling point” because Hodgkin felt “it would be unfair to Bullard’s memory to let it curl up these pages”. See *Two Kings*, Introduction, p.xiii. Also p.66 and p.28.

The inhabitants of Hijaz had numerous national backgrounds; Afghans, Indians, Javanese, Malays, Nigerians, Syrians and Turks were among the many who came for the pilgrimage and stayed behind. Yet Hussein was not content with what he could squeeze from the pilgrims and sought more taxes from the outlying tribes. Among those he was to make demands on were the Utayba of al-Qassim, in the area wedged in between Hijaz and Najd.

This strategic region was to play an important role in the careers of Arabian rulers. Straddling both the interior of Najd and the western Hijaz, al-Qassim was a valuable staging ground for attacks into either region. Important caravan routes between Hijaz and Kuwait and the Gulf Coast also passed through this region. Of particular importance were the settlements of Khurma and Turaba, made up of several oases, and inhabited by members of the Utayba, Subay, Buqum and Shakwa tribes, with the Subay and Utayba being the most prominent. In the nineteenth century Saudi conquests of western Arabia had brought many locals into contact with Muwahhidun ideals.<sup>106</sup>

Philby was however "astonished and bewildered" at the differences between the local inhabitants and the rest of Najd. He was amazed at the "open handed hospitality of its people and of its complete freedom from any kind of religious or sectarian bigotry....it seemed to me that I had stepped suddenly out of barbarism into a highly civilised and even cultured society."<sup>107</sup>

After being re-taken by Ottoman/Egyptian forces, al-Qassim, though nominally independent, was claimed by the Sharif of Mecca. By providing subsidies and appointing several judges and other officials to the area Hussein hoped to strengthen his position. The most significant appointment was that of Khalid ibn Luayy, as the *amir* of Khurma. With his men in place, Hussein felt it was his right to claim taxes and tribute from

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<sup>106</sup> 'Note on Centreal Arabia', no date, IOR L/P&S/18/B334.



the town. However, when Ibn Saud began subsidising local Ikhwan settlements, 'teachers' were sent to al-Qassim to instruct people in Muwahhidun principles. Many in Khurma were won over, among them Khalid ibn Luayy. However, shrewdly, Luayy played it safe and kept his ties to Hussein.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the Sharif learned of the mutinous events in Kurman and launched an attack on the town to regain his authority. The attack was repulsed and Luayy finally broke with Hussein declaring his allegiance, and that of the townspeople, to Ibn Saud. Though the assault failed it embittered Hussein ever more against the Najdi ruler. The stage was set for another battle between Ibn Saud and Hussein.

Though Hussein would never meet Ibn Saud, the Sharif did not have much regard for tribal peoples and considered the Najdi *amir* a lowly servant rather than a capable ruler in his own right. British Consul Bullard who interacted with both men was to remark that Ibn Saud "could have completely overthrown Hussein in politics and probably equalled him in theology, which occupied much of his reading and conversation".<sup>109</sup> Hussein was further incited against Ibn Saud for being embarrassed in Medina. The city was the only Ottoman stronghold which Hussein had been unable to capture and had been placed under siege. Hoping to starve the town into surrender Hussein was sure that supplies were being smuggled through from Najd and Kuwait, via al-Qassim and that Ibn Saud's eldest son, Turki who was in command of the forces that were to maintain the blockade from the east, was the cause.<sup>110</sup> Also bothering Hussein were the many traders involved in blockade busting who were from towns such as Khurma and Turaba.

Several attempts were made by Hussein during the war to occupy Khurma and Turaba which had been thwarted by locals who obtained the assistance of the Ikhwan. Once the war ended Hussein was able to call

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<sup>107</sup> Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, p.161

<sup>108</sup> Luayy himself was related to the Sharifian family. See Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State' pp. 301-302.

<sup>109</sup> Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go: An Autobiography*, London, 1961, p.137.

upon the full complement of his forces that had previously been tied up in Syria and Medina. Led by Hussein's son Abdullah, a force of four to five thousand men equipped with artillery and machine guns took the settlement of Turaba.<sup>111</sup> Proud and confident as a result of his victory, Abdullah boasted that he would move on to take all of Qassim, then Najd and reach the Gulf coast. "We did not come to Turabah for the sake of Turabah and Khurma only".<sup>112</sup>

Abdullah's jubilation was short lived for his boasts ignited the anger of the tribesmen especially Khalid ibn Luayy. A counter-attack was mounted and Abdullah was caught by surprise early in the morning of May 26, 1919, his men were cut down, and he himself fled in his sleeping attire. In one stroke the balance of power in the area shifted from Hussein to Ibn Saud. With Abdullah's army routed there was nothing to hold back a dash for the heart of Hijaz. The opportunity to take Mecca and cleanse it of 'innovation' must have been a dream of the Ikhwan and a valued prize for Ibn Saud. Yet the *amir* refrained from pursuing this campaign further.

British concerns were raised over the future of their 'Hussein' policy and they did not wish to have the Hijaz suddenly overrun by Ibn Saud and Ikhwan. Yet at the Versailles Peace conference, British officials from London and Egypt dominated; "They regarded Ibn Saud as little more than a desert chieftain remotely situated in the centre of Arabia far from the strategic peripheral areas where contradictory claims jeopardised British interests".<sup>113</sup> Had Ibn Saud chosen to stake his claim at that point he could have done so. Charging into Hijaz and capturing key cities would have proved to Britain that they had backed the wrong horse. Some authors have praised Ibn Saud for proving his "statesmanship by his moderation"

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<sup>110</sup>Philby, 'Najd Report' IOR L/P&S/10/2182. See also Troeller, *Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.103.

<sup>111</sup>Safran claims 10,000 beduin were also with Hussain's men, bringing the total figure to 14-15,000 soldiers. Given that most accounts assert the near annihilation of the Sharif's forces this large number of dead would have been noted in communications or by eye witness accounts, but this is not the case. It would seem that a figure of 4-5000 men is a more reasonable figure. See Safran *Saudi Arabia*, p.42.

<sup>112</sup>Habib, *The Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, pp.92-93.

<sup>113</sup>Clayton, *An Arabian Diary* p. 28.



in his response.<sup>114</sup> Yet his restraint in not taking Hijaz was perhaps due more to practicality.

His lines of supply would have been stretched even further and the task of holding and maintaining order would have been made difficult by heightened anxiety in the world Muslim community over the fate of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Groups were active in India and Egypt voicing concerns and opinions regarding the fate and status of those cities. Ibn Saud was wary of Muslim public opinion and sought some endorsement, or at the least, legitimisation from the community at large. Furthermore, it was not certain that Britain would support his holding on to Hijaz and Ibn Saud preferred to wait until he had a better chance. Furthermore, he was still fully funding Ikhwan settlements and could not sustain the additional burdens of disbursing subsidies and gifts in Hijaz which would be required to maintain order. Sharif Hussein had been quite willing to deceive the tribes in his subsidies to them and as a result many dissatisfied beduin raided pilgrim caravans or the Sharif's men, to extract what was their due.<sup>115</sup>

The skirmishes over Khurma took place several times and involved many different parties. The defeat inflicted upon Abdullah's forces in May 1919 is perhaps the most contentious. Kostiner asserts that Khalid bin Luayy was operating independently and had no allegiance to any side. Ironically Luayy had been appointed by Sharif Hussein as governor of Khurma but afterwards Luayy rebelled and either adopted Ikhwan beliefs

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Bullard, *Two Kings*, pp.17-18. Meanwhile Kostiner expends some effort in challenging the idea that the events at Khurma and Turaba were the "turning point constituting Ibn Saud's first significant attempt at expansion". Kostiner asserts that the people of both settlements were not Ikhwan, since their environment did not fit the description of Ikhwan *hujjar* and Ibn Saud was not trying implement plans to expand his empire at that point. If Kostiner relies on Helms, Philby or Troeller for this period this opinion is possible because the distinctions were not made clear by those authors. Helms for example, uses the term Ikhwan liberally which could cause misunderstanding. She does not give a breakdown of the composition of forces which attacked Abdullah, calling all of them Ikhwan when in fact they were mixture of townsfolk and other tribesmen. See Kostiner, *MOSA*, pp.34-43 and Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, p.200-202. McLoughlin and Lacey both mention that Ikhwan were from the settlement of Ghot-ghot, 300 miles away while Safran and

of his own accord or saw political advantages in siding with Ibn Saud — this is not clear.<sup>116</sup> Yet in the fight with Abdullah's men Luayy was supposedly victorious without the help of Ikhwan. Thus Kostiner concludes that Ibn Saud was involved only "indirectly and to a limited extent" and that "neither the people of Khurma nor those of Turaba can be defined as members of the Ikhwan".<sup>117</sup> While Kostiner's assertion that none of the people of Khurma or Turaba were Ikhwan, is technically accurate, it overlooks the fact that many people from those towns joined the Ikhwan and that the other tribes in the area had close ties with the Utayba, and would have been anxious to defend the two towns from domination from Hussein. The most significant point Kostiner makes is that Khalid ibn Luayy instigated hostilities with Hussein without Ibn Saud's involvement. That said, Ikhwan did become involved and the defeat of Abdullah, whether by Luayy's men or Ibn Saud's men, provided an opportunity for a Saudi move against the heart of Hijaz—an opportunity which Ibn Saud did not take.

British officials in India were sceptical of the permanence of Ibn Saud's regime and of the wisdom in backing Hussein. Meanwhile Cairo/London officials didn't want Ibn Saud at all.<sup>118</sup> According to Rendel, doubts about Hussein began only during the course of the war. After the disasters at Khurma and Turaba it became clear to London that Hussein was inefficient, and that Ibn Saud was the one they should support: "We believed that he (Ibn Saud) was in fact the only authority able to bring

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McLoughlin indicate that the Ikhwan that took part came from other areas. See Safran, *Saudi Arabia*, p.42, McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p. 61-62, Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.149.

<sup>116</sup> Various authors have written about Khalid Ibn Luayy and attribute the problems at Khurma to a 'dispute' with Hussain. The exact nature of the dispute is not clear. See Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure*, p.339, Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p. 257, Westrate, *The Arab Bureau*, p. 121. Kostiner offers a more informative view by indicating that tension dated back to the battle for Medina when Luayy had an argument with Hussein's son Abdullah. Later Hussein sought to remove Luayy for a more loyal chief but was unsuccessful. See Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State' p. 301.

<sup>117</sup> See Kostiner, *MOSA*, p.31 and p.35. Kostiner is extremely detailed where previous authors have given broader and more generalised descriptions of that period and it is in this respect that his work is so important.



order out of chaos in Arabia and to create a stable and on the whole effectively administered state".<sup>119</sup>

The events in al-Qassim were a turning point in Britain's commitment to multiple powers in Arabia. The disastrous performance of Hussein's forces and his persistent obnoxious attitude led to Britain's abandonment of the pro-Hussein policy. One official was to comment that "If the Sharif is not strong enough to maintain himself against the Wahhabis he will have to go under and the sooner we make up our minds to it the better."<sup>120</sup> However, the switch occurred gradually and had to be pushed through with the strong backing of Cox and Harry Philby.

Engaged in what could be termed 'camelback-diplomacy', Harry St. John Philby spent much of 1918-1919 travelling between Hussein, Cox and Ibn Saud to ensure what he thought was the proper resolution to the Hijaz-Najd conflict. It was during this period that Philby's displeasure with the attitude of London towards Ibn Saud, while indulging Hussein, came to a head. Philby, was very much inspired by the legend of Captain William Shakespeare and sought to be like him, perhaps envying the closeness and affection Ibn Saud had with the latter. Shakespeare's name was "remembered and held in high honour in Arabia by all he came into contact" with and Philby wanted to make a similar impression himself.<sup>121</sup>

Philby was also influenced by the sympathy that his superior, Percy Cox, had for Ibn Saud. Cox was perhaps the only senior British official to be so concerned. It should be understood though that Cox, unlike Philby who was developing a deep fascination with the *amir* and Arabian life, was thinking more in strategic terms. Cox's responsibility for the eastern Arabian peninsula and the Gulf made him acutely aware of the damage a hostile Saudi *amir* could do to British interests in the east. He was also not impressed with Hussein's irascible character. Yet British policy was again

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<sup>118</sup>Memorandum on British Commitments to Ibn Saud', Political Intelligence Department, Foreign Office, IOR L/P&S/18/B295.

<sup>119</sup>George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive*, p.58.

<sup>120</sup>J.E. Shuckburgh Minute July 8, 1919, IOR L/P&S/10/390:P3827/1919. Shuckburgh was the Assistant Secretary, Political Department, India Office.

looking from the myopic perspective of the Arab Bureau in Cairo and officials in London. The centre of that policy was maintaining a strong Hussein who could, if necessary, at some later point come to an understanding with Ibn Saud. Percy Cox however, had said that "any permanent understanding or peace between the two is out of the question"<sup>122</sup> A few British officials had recognised that Hussein had been trying to "to cause a rift between Ibn Saud and His Majesty's Government". They believed that not alienating Ibn Saud was important: "After all he appears to be the one chief in Arabia thoroughly with us".<sup>123</sup>

Reports from the field were also full of praise for Ibn Saud. The Political Agent in Bahrain, Harold Dickson, declared that Ibn Saud was "without rival throughout Arabia....His bluff, candid and open-hearted manner serve to act as cover for one of the astutest brains that can be found."<sup>124</sup> Dickson observed that most Arabian sheikhs and tribal leaders survived by playing powerful neighbours off against weaker ones: "The Arab way is to exist by putting his powerful neighbours against each other. At the same time, if he cannot do this, he must have a strong protecting power to fall back on".<sup>125</sup> Ibn Saud had been effectively using this method to rule central Arabia.

However, Dickson noticed that the nearby rulers on the Gulf coast were employing similar tactics to undermine Ibn Saud.<sup>126</sup> The ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Salem was using financial incentives to entice certain tribes,

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<sup>121</sup> Philby to Wilson, November 2, 1918, FO 371/4144/4370, cited in Kostiner, *MOSA*, p.20.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, p.255.

<sup>123</sup> Marrs Minute, October 12, 1920 IOR L/P&S/10/936/P7439.

<sup>124</sup> Report of Political Agent, Bahrain August 12, 1920 (H.R.P. Dickson) IOR L/P&S/10/936/B349.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. Dickson also believed that Ibn Saud was being fed a lot of rubbish stories from his advisors about British intentions and world events; "cut off from the world by post and telegraph, and getting as he does, daily exaggerated and false stories from all sides he cannot be blamed if he gets suspicious of our actions." Yet Dickson himself admitted that his own sources of information were questionable. Beduin and various major and minor sheikhs would often pander to British fears or have hidden agendas. Dickson mentioned in his dispatches that the information he was obtaining may not be 100% true and that he was having to judge or guess whether his informant was telling the truth, but that this was the nature of intelligence gathering. Report of Political Agent, Bahrain August 12, 1920 in IOR L/P&S/10/936.



as well as the Sheikh of Bahrain, to switch loyalties and turn away from Ibn Saud. The chief of the Ajman tribe, Ibn Hithlain, refused a bribe and informed Ibn Saud of Kuwaiti intentions. Dickson attributed this activity to the uncertain position Ibn Saud had with Britain which was allowing the small states to intrigue against him. The Political Agent recommended that Britain indicate its firm support for Ibn Saud and allow him to emerge as the strong force in Arabia. This would place all the other states in greater need of Britain's help and thus make them much more obedient and amenable to instructions from London.

#### An Invitation to London

Foreign Office officials wished to invite Ibn Saud to London to extend hospitality to him and the *amir* of Kuwait and to hear their views. For the invitees it provided an opportunity to lodge their complaints and grievances with London. Anxious to have that opportunity but busy with maintaining the integrity of his territories Ibn Saud decided to send his eldest son, Turki, already distinguished in battlefield commands. Yet Turki, contracted the influenza virus and died before he had a chance to leave.<sup>127</sup> The young man left behind a son and three daughters of his own. The influenza epidemic of 1919 was devastating on the Al-Saud. At least two other young sons of Ibn Saud and one of his wives also died in the outbreak.

Turki had been the one most likely to succeed his father. Next in seniority was Saud, and he was also being groomed for leadership; taught the ways of the desert including raiding and falconry. Yet Saud was also the full brother of Turki and it is perhaps understandable that there was a reluctance to send him away so soon after Turki's death. So it fell upon the shoulders of the third son, Faisal, a boy of just thirteen to represent Ibn Saud in London.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 277.

<sup>128</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.61.

Faisal had distinguished maternal family connections of his own. His mother, Tarfah was from the family of Al Al-Sheikh, and a direct descendent of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. Tarfah died when Faisal was just five or six, and he was sent to live with his maternal grandfather, Sheikh Abdullah ibn Abdul Latif, far away from the royal court. Faisal was a sickly child but was drilled in religious principles, Islamic jurisprudence and classical Arabic. He had no full brothers of his own nor any half-brothers of his age. Several years separated him from those younger and older than him. Faisal had a somewhat lonely childhood.

Though sheltered from the responsibilities and busy pace of his father's majlis, Faisal was better educated and maturer than many of his brothers. He also gained the tools to be a critical thinker, which would help him in later life.<sup>129</sup> He developed a fondness for poetry, especially liting beduin verse which he spent long nights of his youth by the campfire listening to and reciting. Faisal's curiosity and eagerness to learn gave him an intellectual edge over his siblings. Thus when Faisal became *amir* of Hijaz and later King of Saudi Arabia he was capable of diffusing religious opposition to his policies by engaging the *ulema* in debates citing judicial texts to successfully defend his positions.<sup>130</sup>

Faisal's mission to London was somewhat symbolic since he would not be the main negotiator in meetings with British officials. Accompanying him were two escorts, Abdullah al-Qosaibi, a prominent al-Hasa merchant and Ahmad Thunayan a relative from the Thunayan branch of the family. Ahmad had spent most of his life in Turkey, returning to Riyadh only after Ibn Saud had captured the city in his first conquest. Speaking both Turkish and French it was Thunayan's role to advise young Faisal on how to deal with 'foreigners' and he was to take up the issue of

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<sup>129</sup>Alexander Bligh, *From Prince To King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century*, New York: New York University Press, 1984, p.20.

<sup>130</sup>Vincent Sheean, *Faisal: The King and his Kingdom*, Tavistock, UK: University Press of Arabia, 1975, p.79.



Hussein and disputes in al-Qassim with British officials..<sup>131</sup> Abdullah al-Qosaibi was entrusted in obtaining needed supplies and equipment from Europe.

It was the first time a member of the Al-Saud was to travel to Europe. The teenage son of the *amir* of Najd met King George V at Buckingham Palace; toured the House of Commons and Lords; saw Cambridge University; met Harry Philby's young son Kim (who was later to become a famous Soviet spy), and visited over a dozen battlefields in northern France. Faisal spent much of his time, experiencing and exploring the sights of Europe while his escorts fulfilled their missions. Al-Qosaibi busied himself in procuring various equipment and supplies to take back to Riyadh. In talks with British officials in Paris, Ahmad Thunayan who was being pressed to realise the need for moderation in Saudi-Hussein relations, stated "I give you my word on behalf of my master, Ibn Saud, that no matter what the provocation, there shall be no war for three years".<sup>132</sup> Ahmad Thunayan also had a meeting with Faisal ibn Hussein, one of the Sharif's other sons. This was arranged by British officials in an attempt to resolve some of the conflicts over al-Qassim towns like Khurma and Turaba. The meeting nearly led to blows as both sides traded insults instead of working out any agreement.<sup>133</sup>

When the group returned to Najd in February, 1920, Ibn Saud was pleased at the hospitality given to his son but distressed at the reports from Ahmad Thunayan. He was outraged hearing that British officials still thought more highly of Hussein than of himself and that they expected the *amir* to work with the Sharif. Ibn Saud complained of this to Percy Cox whom he met while the latter was on his way to take on the post of High Commissioner in Iraq.<sup>134</sup> More infuriating were the suggestions that Faisal ibn Hussein would be made King of Iraq. Cox assured the *amir* that he personally did not approve of such a measure, but Cox was unaware that

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<sup>131</sup>Gerald De Gaury, *Faisal: King of Saudi Arabia*, London: Arthur Barker, 1966, p.22.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid. pp. 29-30.

<sup>133</sup>McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, pp.62-63.

back in London officials were about to inaugurate a new era in British policy.

### Reorganising British Administration

In February 1921, Winston Churchill became Secretary of State for the Colonies. He was to launch a major re-evaluation of British policy towards the Middle East. A month after taking office Churchill convened a conference in Cairo, where he gathered together experts on the Middle East from various government departments.<sup>135</sup> One of the objectives was reduce the inefficiency of British administration caused by competing responsibilities of the various authorities in London, Cairo and Delhi. Churchill sought to bring central control to the Colonial Office. More importantly he looked to cut down financial expenditures in order to avoid "demanding further sacrifices from the British taxpayer."<sup>136</sup> As a result of the Cairo conference the overlapping jurisdictions were dissolved in favour of one administrative entity, the Middle East Department. Churchill felt strongly about the need to co-ordinate policy stating that:

The Arab problem is all one, and any attempt to divide it will only reintroduce the same paralysis and confusion of action which has done so much harm during the last two years.....Feisal or Abdullah, whether in Mesopotamia or Mecca; King Hussein at Mecca; Bin Saud at Najd; Bin Rashid at Hail; the Sheikh of Kuwait; and King Samuel at Jerusalem are all inextricably interwoven and no conceivable policy can have any chance which does not pull all the strings affecting them. <sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p. 28.

<sup>135</sup>India Office, Department Minute, March 3, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/938/P989 outlines the purpose of the Cairo conference of 1921. See also Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, p.467

<sup>136</sup>Winston Churchill, speech on 'Middle East Government Policy' in the House of Commons, June 14, 1921. Text reprinted in *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, Vol. III, ed. Robert James, London:Chelsea House Publishers, 1974. p.3096.

<sup>137</sup>Letter from Churchill to the Prime Minister from Nice, 12 January, 1921 cited in Aaron Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*, Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.



The Middle East Department was to enable policy making to be centralised in London where it was based. This meant that issues between His Majesty's Government and Ibn Saud were to be handled by the new department and involve only the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, and not the India Office.<sup>138</sup> However, since the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf was also responsible for the local administrative issues of the Arabian littoral (Trucial states) he would still consult regularly with the Government of India. But in matters relating to a political nature the Political Resident was to have the prior approval of the Colonial Office.<sup>139</sup>

Churchill proudly told the House of Commons that as a result of his re-organisation, "within the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, and throughout the whole of that great area, we have a single clear policy upon which all the authorities, military and civil, are at the present time agreed".<sup>140</sup>

The work of the Middle East Department was to take on added complications by the new territorial jurisdictions created at the end of the First World War. The former Ottoman territories of the Middle East had been divided amongst the Allied powers at Versailles. Britain was formally granted the mandates over Palestine, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq by the Council of the League of Nations in July 1922. Syria and Lebanon were given to France. Sharif Hussein was retained as ruler of Hijaz while his sons Abdullah and Faisal were made <sup>rulers</sup> ~~kings~~ of Transjordan and Iraq respectively.<sup>141</sup> Faisal ibn Hussein was appointed <sup>King</sup> ~~regent~~ of Iraq and his brother Abdullah was given Transjordan. The Hashemite family now had centres of power in Amman, Baghdad, and Mecca. Trapped in central Arabia Ibn Saud lamented that for all his efforts to support Britain, she had "surrounded me with enemies".<sup>142</sup> British policy had been summed up by

<sup>138</sup> Busch *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921* p.442-443.

<sup>139</sup> India Office Departmental Minute, March 3, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/938/P989.

<sup>140</sup> Winston Churchill, speech on 'Middle East Government Policy' in the House of Commons, June 14, 1921. Text reprinted in *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, Vol. III, ed. Robert James, London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1974. p.3096.

<sup>141</sup> Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, p.473.

<sup>142</sup> Rihani, Ameen. *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia*, London: Constable and Co. 1928, p. 65.

the Foreign Office, Middle East Committee: "keep Ibn Saud in play, by small doles of money, pending developments in the military situation, but not to supply him except very sparingly with arms, ammunition, and military instructors".<sup>143</sup>

In fact Ibn Saud was practically ignored. To his alarm Britain had rewarded his Hashemite enemies with territory and money. Was Ibn Saud to believe that he was considered not much more than just another desert chief. He clearly did not accept this. His family had been rulers of Najd, and at times much of Arabia, in preceding centuries. On August 22, 1921, Ibn Saud proclaimed himself 'Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies' (*sultan najd wa malhaqatiha*)<sup>144</sup> This elevated him over other tribal chiefs and also gave him at least equal stature to Sharif Hussein of Mecca. His new title did not reduce the political and financial strain. In fact Ibn Saud learned that Faisal of Iraq was making overtures to the Al-Rashid of Hail which threatened to further encircle the Najdi polity. Ibn Saud was forced into action.<sup>145</sup>

Though Hail was four hundred miles north-west of Riyadh in the region of Jebel Shammar, it was strategically located so that caravans travelling between Najd and Syria, as well as from Egypt to Kuwait, passed through her territory. Great revenues could be gained from taxes and tribute. Fortunately for Ibn Saud there was a great deal of turmoil within the Al-Rashid family itself in the year 1920-1921.<sup>146</sup> Rivalry and internal divisions had led to the assassination of the ruling *amir* and the succession of Abdullah ibn Miteb Al-Rashid, an inexperienced boy of eighteen. King Faisal was trying to use the situation to his advantage and extend Iraqi influence into Hail. However, Ibn Saud decided to launch a pre-emptive strike against the Al-Rashid before the Hashemites could establish strong

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<sup>143</sup> Minutes of Middle East Committee Meeting, January 19, 1918, IOR L/P&S/18/B280/P337.

<sup>144</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 281.

<sup>145</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.66-67.

<sup>146</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.109.



links there. Not only would this enhance Najdi security but it would enlarge the tribes from whom taxes could be drawn.<sup>147</sup>

The town of Hail had solid fortifications. Taking it by force would be costly in men and resources. Ibn Saud chose to lay in siege hoping to force a surrender. While initially holding out, the young *amir* of Hail, sent an envoy to meet Ibn Saud in order to negotiate. Ibn Saud agreed to a peaceful settlement if certain conditions were met; that control over foreign relations would be relinquished; all matters of dispute should be submitted to Ibn Saud for arbitration; and though they would have the right to manage their internal affairs, Ibn Saud would have the final decision on any issue.<sup>148</sup> The terms were harsh and not all of the Al-Rashid agreed and were particularly galled at the idea of being subservient to their arch rivals in Najd.

Another series of skirmishes took place. None of them were decisive. Ibn Saud tightened the siege around Hail. With few supplies allowed inside the beleaguered capital, the inhabitants drifted into starvation. Some relief came from smuggled goods which Ibn Saud suspected Sharif Hussein of having a hand in. For this Ibn Saud complained vociferously to the British Political Agent in Bahrain. He blamed the Sharif for complicating matters and prolonging the siege by raising the hopes of the towns people.

Finally, with conditions unbearable in the city, the Al-Rashid capitulated. On November 4, 1921 Ibn Saud entered Hail and met with the defeated Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid. The *amir* was certain he was to be executed. Instead, to his surprise, he was told that himself and three other senior male members of the Al-Rashid family would be taken to Riyadh where they would be treated well and 'looked after'. A move that would

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<sup>147</sup> Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis*, London: Frank Cass, 1983, p.31, f.note 48. See also Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, p.67.

<sup>148</sup> These conditions were remarkably similar to the ones that the Ottomans and the British had made on Ibn Saud. See Ibn Saud to Political Agent, Bahrain, May 8, 1920, IOR R/15/2/40. Also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 67 and Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp.167-170.

later prove to have effectively placed them under house arrest.<sup>149</sup> The townspeople who had feared being plundered were surprised at the restraint of Saudi forces. Ibn Saud had forbid his men from taking booty and instead provided food to the starving inhabitants. In a move which upset some of the Ikhwan, orders were also given to spare the Shia minority from harassment.<sup>150</sup>

The capture of Hail brought the whole of north-west Arabia into Ibn Saud's hands.<sup>151</sup> Now he claimed all land the Al-Rashid ruled or had ruled in the past which brought him right up to the Syrian, Trans-Jordanian and Iraqi borders. This included the strategically important area of Wadi Sirhan which lay between Central Arabia and Syria. Serving as a corridor between Transjordan and Iraq, Wadi Sirhan acted as a buffer between two Hashemite territories. It was also an area where Britain had hoped to place rail and pipeline links. Britain would now have to recognise him as a major force. The expansion also meant that Ibn Saud was increasingly relying on the Ikhwan to secure his position and that reliance would prove dangerous as the Ikhwan became rebellious and challenged Ibn Saud's leadership. In the next chapter we shall see how the relationship between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan deteriorated into mutual distrust and animosity.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> al-Rashid, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*, pp.245-249. See also Troeller, *Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 168-169 and Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.29.

<sup>150</sup> Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, p. 102

<sup>151</sup> In contrast to this account, Leslie McLoughlin in *Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom*, p.65 attributes the fall of the city to a secret deal with the deputy governor of Hail who was to have opened the gates of the town and let in Ibn Saud's men. McLoughlin is not clear about the source of this information but it does not correlate with accounts in the India Office Records nor with the accounts of Al-Rashid family history as told by Madawi al-Rashid in *Politics of an Arabian Oasis*, p.245-246 as well as Robert Lacey's *The Kingdom*. The omission is despite the fact that McLoughlin's work (1993) is more recent than Madawi al-Rashid (1991) or indeed Lacey's (1981).

<sup>152</sup> Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, pp. 120-143.



## Chapter 5

### From Conquest to Rebellion: the Ikhwan Warriors of Ibn Saud 1921-1930

Expansion into the northwest of Arabia brought new tribal groups under the jurisdiction of Ibn Saud. However, this was not a welcome prospect for many tribes. Unwilling to conform to strict Muwahhidun rules, wary of high taxes and the strong-arm tactics of Ikhwan, sections of the Anaizah and Shammar tribes crossed the porous and ill defined borders into Iraq. They hoped to continue their traditional patterns of seasonal migration and had no desire to be under the rule of a central government. From their new bases in Iraq these tribes raided the settlements that the Ikhwan had taken over.<sup>1</sup> This launched a series of raids and counter raids, completely disrupting trade and tribal migratory patterns.<sup>2</sup>

A key leader of Ikhwan raids was Faisal al-Duwish, a member of the Mutayr tribe. British officials believed that Ibn Saud was sanctioning the raids by al-Duwish. Ibn Saud denied this, but defended the Ikhwan's actions, claiming that they were acting in self defence and trying to retrieve livestock taken by Iraqi raiders. He argued that Mutayri tribesmen like al-Duwish had always migrated freely from one region to another throughout the year and would not accept restrictions to their traditional lifestyle.<sup>3</sup> On March 11, 1922, Faisal al-Duwish launched a major raid, with over a thousand Ikhwan, deep inside Iraqi territory. Casualties were high and included a unit of the Iraqi Camel Corps, the local desert police. The Government of Iraq protested loudly and requested that the High Commissioner authorise Royal Air Force units to hunt down and bomb the attackers.<sup>4</sup>

The High Commissioner of Iraq knew Ibn Saud well. Percy Cox had been appointed to the position following the assumption of the British

<sup>1</sup> Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam*, p.124; Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p.62

<sup>2</sup> Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.174.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Saud to High Commissioner Iraq, July 14 1921, PRO FO 371/7711/E2566.

<sup>4</sup> High Commissioner Iraq to SOSCO, March 13, 1922, PRO FO 371/7711/E28971. Also Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p. 31.

mandate there.<sup>5</sup> Cox did not authorise the RAF attack but realised steps needed to be taken to resolve the situation. He was concerned that relations between Najd and Iraq should be repaired and that border demarcations be agreed. Cox called a meeting in the town of Mohammera on May 5 1922 in order to discuss boundary issues. Ibn Saud agreed to send a representative but did not attend himself.

During the discussions Cox suggested tribal water wells and grazing pastures be used to identify areas in which specific tribes could graze, the details of which were to be decided on a later date. A committee of experts was tasked with the job of deciding which tribes would be considered to be under Iraq and Saudi jurisdiction. The decision would be binding on both the governments of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi's were amenable to this, so was Ibn Saud's representative. Yet when the committee of experts decided that the tribes of Muntafiq, Amarat and Dhafir should be under Iraqi jurisdiction Ibn Saud refused to ratify the agreement claiming that his agent had given too many concessions.<sup>6</sup>

Following the failure of the Moham<sup>m</sup>era meeting Ikhwan raids on Transjordan increased. At one point, the raiders boldly came within fifteen miles of Amman. British troops in armoured cars and Royal Air Force planes were sent out to chase the attackers away.<sup>7</sup> Ibn Saud's reaction to the Ikhwan raids was two-fold. In response to British protests he defended the action, claiming that it was provoked, but at the same time he sent secret messages, admonishing the Ikhwan for unauthorised raids. At other times, when it suited his political ends, he would express his satisfaction at them.<sup>8</sup>

Controlling the Ikhwan was a delicate balancing act. Their determination and zeal was useful for unsettling the Hashemite powers.

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<sup>5</sup>Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, p.420.

<sup>6</sup>Ibn Saud's main objection was the refusal to hand over individuals and tribes that had 'defected' to the Iraqi side. Ibn Saud wanted to punish them as criminals, but Cox would not agree to that. See Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.175.

<sup>7</sup>Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.33

<sup>8</sup>Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam*, p.126



More importantly, Ikhwan conquests provided economic benefits by bringing more tribes under Ibn Saud's authority which in turn increased his tax base. Raids were another matter. They were not always efficient providers of resources, and at times inconvenient—occurring just when a deal was being struck with British or other local rulers. His chief advisor Hafiz Wahba described Ibn Saud's attitude:

But in spite of the Ikhwan's excesses, rashness, impetuosity and defiance of the Government, Abdul Aziz treated them with forbearance hitherto unknown in an Arab king, on grounds that whatever excesses, they were a great deal better than they had been before and that in the fullness of time this phase of harsh intolerance would be softened.<sup>9</sup>

For Percy Cox the continued Ikhwan raids were causing a nuisance and hampering efforts to create a stable government in Iraq. It was imperative that the vague boundaries between Iraq, Najd and Kuwait were clearly identified.<sup>10</sup> Cox renewed his invitation to leaders from Iraq, Kuwait and Najd to try to hammer out some form of frontier treaty. This time however, Cox insisted that Ibn Saud himself be present.

A new meeting was called on November 21, 1922 at Uqair, a town on the eastern al-Hasa coast.<sup>11</sup> Present were Percy Cox, Colonel Harold Dickson, Political Agent in Bahrain, Sabih Beg, Minister of Communications and Public Works, representing King Faisal of Iraq, and Major J.C. More, the Political Agent in Kuwait, who was deputised to represent the Al-Sabah family. Ibn Saud represented himself. Also present was the famous Lebanese-American traveller Ameen Rihani. He served as an observer, ad hoc translator and commentator for Ibn Saud.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hafiz Wahba, *Arabian Days*, London: Arthur Baker, 1964, p.131.

<sup>10</sup> Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939*, p.27.

<sup>11</sup> HRP, Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1956, pp. 270-278; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee* pp.65-71. Dickson and Philby are consistently the most commonly cited references for this period. Goldrup (*Saudi Arabia*, pp.357-358, fn15) writing in 1970's and Vassiliev writing in the 1990's (*The History of Saudi Arabia*, p.257 fn28.) rely primarily on these works. This is also the case in the following works as well; Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp.209, fn19&20; Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, pp.179, fn87 and Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia*, p.86, fn79.

<sup>12</sup> Clayton, *Arabian Diary*, p. 34.

However, during the five day period of discussions there were frequent disagreements between Ibn Saud and Sabih Beg over territory and history. At one point Sabih Beg claimed that Iraqi territory extended as far as Medina in the Hijaz. Ibn Saud retorted that his family had ruled up to Aleppo in Syria and Basra in Iraq. Neither side was willing to accept the other's argument, for to do so would prejudice their position when it came to the final deal. No matter what each man actually believed, each sought to squeeze as much out of the occasion as possible.<sup>13</sup>

The agenda that Cox hoped to pursue was over tribal allegiances and border delineation.<sup>14</sup> The High Commissioner was particularly concerned with the Dhafir and Amarat tribes that wandered between Najd and Iraq. According to Rihani, Ibn Saud was unaware of the agenda Cox had planned. The Saudi *amir* had not come to Uqair to discuss border issues, or the Amarat and Dhafir. He had complaints of his own to raise against the British—for surrounding him with his old enemies the Hashemites. Had he known that Cox would be conspiring with the Iraqi regime to fix his borders, he would not have come.<sup>15</sup> Tensions were not eased by the fact that Cox kept the *amir* and his party waiting for several days in the humid climate of Uqair, making all present quite irascible.

Once the session began, Cox introduced the parties and left it to the Saudi and Iraqi representatives to work out the details of the agreement. Ibn Saud made it clear from the outset that he was opposed to fixed and arbitrary borders. The tribes under his authority, especially the Ikhwan,

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<sup>13</sup> Zirkili, *Shibh al Jazira, fi ahd al Malik Abd al-Aziz*, part 1, pp.288-289.

<sup>14</sup> During the Uqair meetings Percy Cox realised that Ibn Saud considered all of Qatar as part of al-Hasa and therefore subject to his taxes and rules. Cox reminded the king sharply that Qatar was not part of his territory and Ibn Saud did not press the point. An official at the India Office who later read Cox's report was of the opinion that it would have been a better sign if the king had argued the point bitterly and fiercely. Giving in so swiftly seemed suspicious, Simpson Minute, March 2, 1923, IOR L/P&S/11/222/ P731/23. Indeed the Saudi *amir* of al-Hasa frequently gave refuge to Qatari insurgents and also supported rebellious elements of the Qatari ruling family that crossed over into Saudi territory. Eventually, the *amir* of Qatar was forced to pay Ibn Saud tribute of 100,000 rupees a year for stability in his country. See also R.S. Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, London: Routledge, 1979, pp.81-83.

<sup>15</sup> Rihani, *Ibn S 'aoud of Arabia*, pp.59-60.



would not agree to being restricted by invisible lines in the sand. Moreover, accepting fixed borders would crystallise the power of the Hashemites. If boundaries had to be discussed Ibn Saud suggested that they be based on tribal lines and not borders that would split tribal *diras* through the middle. Therefore, entire tribes should belong either on the Iraqi or Saudi side. This was also better for security. Along with this demand Ibn Saud sought to have the entire Dhafir tribe placed under his jurisdiction and since their grazing ground extended up to the Euphrates he claimed his borders should reflect that. Percy Cox thought this idea "ridiculous" and did not allow it to be pursued.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Saud was emphatic that tribes like the Dhafir were originally from Najd and were therefore to be considered Najdi subjects. The Amarat tribe also came from Najd, and more importantly, was a branch of Ibn Saud's own tribe, the Anaizah. Therefore the Amarat were his 'cousins' — naturally his authority extended over them as well. Thus Ibn Saud expected the Iraqi authorities to turn over all renegade tribesmen to Najd and to extract back taxes owed to Najd from all those tribal groups that had left for sanctuary in Iraq.<sup>17</sup> However, both tribes had moved to Iraq precisely to avoid Najdi taxation and harassment from the Ikhwan and King Faisal firmly opposed his rival's efforts.

Trying another approach, Ibn Saud proposed to have known wells and tribal grazing grounds determine the borders. Since each tribe would know which areas were historically theirs and which were not, this would be a relatively simple solution. Any locations claimed by more than one tribe, would be made neutral. However, Ibn Saud still pressed for Najdi merchants access to market towns around the Euphrates. Sabih Beg, who insisted that Iraq's borders be not less than two hundred miles south of the Euphrates, rejected this.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.274.

<sup>17</sup> Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 179

<sup>18</sup> Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.34.

As negotiations stalled, and with no agreement in sight, a frustrated Percy Cox decided to intervene. During a break in the conference he took Dickson to Ibn Saud's tent for a serious discussion. Cox reprimanded the *amir* for his "childish" tribal boundary idea. Cox declared that he would himself decide on "the type and general line of the frontier". According to Dickson, Ibn Saud broke down weeping and declared that "Sir Percy was his father and mother, who had made him and raised him from nothing to the position which he held and that he would surrender half his kingdom, nay the whole, if Sir Percy ordered." <sup>19</sup>

This exchange seemed to have the desired effect. When the conference re-convened Ibn Saud remained quiet and let Cox take the lead. Using a red pencil Cox drew a line from the Gulf coast to Jabal Anaizah, close to the Trans-Jordan frontier. This area would be granted to Iraq. In one stroke a large portion of the territory claimed by Najd had been given to King Feisal. To forestall Ibn Saud's complaints Cox cut the territory allotted to Kuwait by two-thirds and placed that under Najdi jurisdiction. In addition Cox created a Kuwait Neutral Zone and an Iraq Neutral Zone which would ostensibly serve to provide areas where tribes could graze and obtain water without problems relating to border crossings and customs procedures.

Following the boundary drawing episode Ibn Saud asked for a private meeting with Percy Cox (Dickson was also present). Ibn Saud protested at the way in which he had been treated stating; "My friend, you have deprived me of half my kingdom. Better take it all and let me go into retirement" and then according to Dickson, Ibn Saud "burst out into sobs". Cox replied, with tears also rolling down his cheeks; "My friend I know

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<sup>19</sup>Despite Lacey's assertion that Cox was an 'excellent Arabist' and drafted all his own Arabic correspondence, Dickson claims that Cox's Arabic was "not too good" and that he had to do the translating for Cox. See Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.80 and Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.274. Even Kostiner's detailed work *The Making of Saudi Arabia*, does not cite any official report to corroborate this incident but relies on Dickson's account. Also Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p. 181. We do not know if a similar reprimand was issued to the Iraqi delegates.



exactly how you feel, and for this reason I give you two thirds of Kuwait territory I don't know how Ibn Sabah will take the blow".<sup>20</sup> Dickson observed this display of emotion and could not help but be suspicious. He knew of Ibn Saud's reputation as a shrewd negotiator and remarked, that in matters of diplomacy Ibn Saud was "without rival throughout Arabia.....His bluff, candid and open-hearted manner serve to act as cover for one of the astutest brains that can be found."<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately for Kuwait, Major Moore, who was entrusted with the task of looking out for her interests, said little throughout the conference. Percy Cox had clearly dominated him. As a result, Ahmad Jabir Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti *amir*, received a shock. He had been in power for barely a year and within a few days lost a sizeable portion of territory without a shot fired or battle waged. When Cox later arrived in Kuwait to get the amir's signature on the Uqair accords he had to placate a very upset ruler. Cox insisted that what had been done was necessary to satisfy a powerful neighbour who would have taken the land anyway by force. Ahmad Al-Sabah was still reluctant to sign an agreement about which he had not been consulted, but he could not refuse. Although he gave his signature, Al-Sabah demanded to know if after Ibn Saud's death the British Government would object to him denouncing the agreement and reclaiming his lost territory. Cox's bemused reply was "No....and God bless your efforts".<sup>22</sup>

This was a watershed event for the tribes of Najd. For centuries they had been free to travel northwards for trade and supplies. New frontiers meant that they would be forced to change their patterns of life, relying on the somewhat under developed Saudi ports of Qatif and Uqair instead. Dickson himself did not approve of Cox's methods, believing that an

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<sup>20</sup>Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.274, and Troeller, *the Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.181.

<sup>21</sup> Dickson was very much in favour of Ibn Saud being a strong player in Arabia so that other chiefs would turn to Britain for help. See Dickson's insightful memo, Political Agent Bahrain, August 12, 1920, IOR L/P&S/10/936/B349.

<sup>22</sup>Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.279.

arbitrary western type of boundary was a "serious error".<sup>23</sup> Many tribal chiefs could not understand the logic of the agreements and the fact that the restrictions were imposed by a foreign power only heightened their disapproval. The Mutayr tribe was particularly affected by the frontier agreements. One member of their tribe, the notorious Ikhwan raider, Faisal al-Duwish, became determined to thwart the accords.

There could also have been another factor Cox was considering—mineral resources. The subject came up during the negotiations when one of Ibn Saud's advisors, Abdul Latif al-Mandil, urged Cox not to create a Neutral Zone with Kuwait. He wanted the territory to stay with Najd. Cox insisted that it was necessary but al-Mandil pressed his point. When Cox wanted to know why it was so important for that area to stay in Najd, al-Mandil's reply was "because we think oil exists there". Unfazed Cox responded that was "exactly why I have made it a neutral zone. Each side shall have half a share".<sup>24</sup>

There was another individual also interested in oil—Major Frank Holmes—a New Zealand prospector, mining engineer and businessman who had served in the Royal Marines. He represented the Eastern and General Syndicate, a small company with big ambitions. Holmes sought an audience with Ibn Saud in order to put in a bid for oil concessions. As the negotiations between the Iraqis and the Saudis dragged on Holmes waited for five days in the company of another colourful character, Ameen Rihani. The Lebanese-American traveller had helped Holmes prepare his application for a concession and advised him on how to proceed.<sup>25</sup>

Percy Cox however, was not disposed to allowing the New Zealander meet Ibn Saud. He pressured Ibn Saud not to entertain Holmes' requests, arguing that Eastern and General was not an oil company and would seek to sell its concessions to other parties. Ibn Saud was interested

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid p.276.

<sup>24</sup>Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.274-275 and Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, p.211.

<sup>25</sup>Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia*, pp.78-79.



in pursuing the matter, but Cox wanted none of it. He went so far as to draft a letter of rejection for Ibn Saud to sign but the *amir* did not agree to do so. Cox was insistent that the New Zealander be rebuffed. Ibn Saud tried several times to refuse but then finally gave in. Britain's £60,000 subsidy was a heavy weapon effectively wielded by Cox. It is perhaps this incident which contributed to Ibn Saud's subsequent decision to negotiate with American oil companies for oil concessions. He would be much less constrained with them and they would not have the same power as Cox had over him.

Major Holmes never had his meeting with Ibn Saud. Instead, he was to learn from Percy Cox that his request had been turned down. The time was not ripe for oil concessions in Arabia and the British Government would not be able to provide protection for such operations.<sup>26</sup> It seemed clear to Dickson that Cox did not like Holmes because an independent operator would be "inimical to His Majesty's interests".<sup>27</sup> However, Cox had ulterior motives. He had already been in touch with a close friend and former deputy, Arnold Wilson, who worked for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) with the idea of approaching Ibn Saud for a concession. Apparently a letter was written by Wilson and sent to Ibn Saud but the issue had not developed further. Anglo-Persian's major shareholder was the British Government and Cox was keen to keep out competitors from the region.<sup>28</sup> By creating neutral zones Cox prevented any one country from claiming exclusive drilling rights should oil be discovered there. Britain would then be able to enter the area without having to apply for concessions or face restrictions imposed by one particular local ruler.

The Uqair conference ended on December 2, 1922 with the signing of Najd-Iraq and Najd-Kuwait frontier protocols. Though Cox had known Ibn Saud for many years and had developed a personal relationship with the *amir* as High Commissioner of Iraq, he was looking out for the interests of

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<sup>26</sup>Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp. 68-69 ; Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.276-277.

<sup>27</sup>Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p.278.

King Faisal as well as Britain. The accords signed at Uqair seemed a great achievement for Cox. He had obtained Ibn Saud's agreement to a fixed frontier and had refused to grant free access to Najdi tribes to the interior of Iraq which bode well for Iraqi security concerns.<sup>29</sup> Yet this would also set the stage for further clashes between Ikhwan and the tribes of Arabia. Cox had focused on the security of Iraq without solving the disputes between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein. Neither were the tribes of northern Najd being taken into consideration in the delineation of borders. There were no discussions or involvement of, the chiefs in the conference proceedings and the terms of the new agreement were simply to be passed down to them. Ibn Saud nevertheless, gained recognition from Britain and Iraq of his eastern borders and he proceeded to secure more advantages in the west.<sup>30</sup>

#### Ikhwan Raids and the Northwest Frontier

Having taken the city of Hail, Ibn Saud looked north-west, sending the Ikhwan to attack and take the towns of al-Jauf and Skaka in the oasis of Wadi Sirhan.<sup>31</sup> Several tribes, including the Bani Sakhr tribe of Transjordan used the oasis for animal pasture. These were important economic and strategic areas. Al-Jauf was famous for its salt production and an important point along the trade route to Syria. Previously the Al-Rashid of Hail had controlled the area. Taking Wadi Sirhan would break the continuity of the Transjordan-Iraqi borders, providing a buffer zone to the Hashemite territories.<sup>32</sup> Holding this area also enabled Ibn Saud to increase his tax base.

During one particular incident in August 1922 the Ikhwan raided within twenty-four miles of Amman. Hashemite complaints to London

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<sup>28</sup>Departmental Minute, Colonial Office, July 26, 1923, PRO CO 727/7#37402.

<sup>29</sup> Clayton, *Arabian Diary*, p. 34.; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.70

<sup>30</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.70

<sup>31</sup>Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud*, p.79.

<sup>32</sup>Joseph, Kostiner, "Britain and the Northern Frontier of the Saudi State, 1922-1925" in *The Great Powers in the Middle East*, Uriel Dann, ed., New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988 p.38.



were vociferous. It also became apparent that the boundaries with Transjordan had to be fixed by treaty as well.<sup>33</sup> Ibn Saud was less inclined to prevent the attacks since he knew that all subsidies paid to Arab chiefs would be terminated in March 1924. Cox then attempted to get Ibn Saud to meet with Hashemite leaders, this time in Kuwait, to settle frontiers with Transjordan. But Ibn Saud's reaction was lukewarm as there was little incentive to conclude a treaty that might benefit his rivals.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Ibn Saud did send a representative to Kuwait, to attend a series of meetings in November 1923.<sup>35</sup> Again arguments characterised much of the proceedings. The delegates from Iraq, and Transjordan were united in opposition to Ibn Saud. The British Political Agent, S.G. Knox, who was mediating noted that the Hashemite delegates were making unreasonable demands and statements designed to inflame Ibn Saud. However, he was confident that the Najdi delegation could be forced to accept an agreement. Knox cabled the Secretary of State that "Bin Saud can be easily coerced should His Majesty's Government so decide".<sup>36</sup>

However, Knox was overly optimistic. In fact the Saudi delegates were particularly upset that Iraq granted a refuge to tribes from Najd. Many of the Shammar tribesman who did not wish to remain in Hail after the defeat of the Al-Rashid dynasty and the subsequent establishment of Saudi authority had crossed into Iraq. This denied Ibn Saud much needed revenue from taxes and was also a blow to his prestige.<sup>37</sup> Inflaming matters was the fact that the Shammar had turned around and begun raiding into Najd from Iraqi territory. Thus Najdi negotiators at the Conference were instructed to obtain the return of such tribes to Ibn Saud's authority so that they could be punished. Iraqi delegates however, refused and were

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<sup>33</sup> Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>34</sup> Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.37.

<sup>35</sup> 'Report of the Kuwait Conference', Political Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, March 30, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P1992.

<sup>36</sup> Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, December 5, 1923, PRO CO 727/7 #59291.

<sup>37</sup> Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State' pp. 298-323.

adamant in their opposition to anything the Najdi's proposed. Moreover the Transjordanian representatives wanted Wadi Sirhan returned and the Hijazi's asked for a buffer zone to be established.<sup>38</sup>

The conference dragged on from December 1923 to April 1924 and was adjourned twice in between due to high tensions.<sup>39</sup> Ibn Saud laid the blame squarely on the Iraqis who he called "grasping and adamant....wanting everything their own way".<sup>40</sup> Matters were further strained when Faisal al-Duwish and his Mutayr tribesman raided into Iraq in the second week of March 1924 while the negotiations were yet to be completed. Reports of the battle indicated a brutal assault. Casualty figures varied but were estimated at above 250. Livestock lost numbered over 10,000. No prisoners were taken. Men and boys that were wounded were reportedly killed. The occurrence of such a raid while discussions were ongoing disturbed many British officials. Knox the Kuwait Political agent sent this report: "There is no doubt that the Sultan of Najd is a most unpleasant person, an inveterate intriguer, and his myrmidons, the Ikhwan even worse. The tales I hear of their conduct during their forays are revolting in the extreme."<sup>41</sup>

Other British reports of the raid which noted that women were "treated well" and that the Ikhwan gave them food, water, and in some cases animals for transport, elicited surprise.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, because of the raid Hashemite officials believed that they had an overwhelmingly strong

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<sup>38</sup>Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO December 21, 1923, dispatch contained in Report on the Kuwait Conference December 27, 1923, PRO CO 727/7 #62577; Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, p. 215.

<sup>39</sup>Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, December 27, 1923, PRO CO 727/7 #62424. One of the most contentious demands made by the Iraqi's was that Ibn Saud should first make peace with Sharif Hussein before any final agreements could be made with Baghdad. Ibn Saud refused to be told what to do by Iraq. 'Report of the Kuwait Conference', Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, March 30, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P1992.

<sup>40</sup>Letter from Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, May 2, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P2785. On March 7, 1924 Sharif Hussein unilaterally proclaimed himself Khalifa (Caliph) and this incensed the Ikhwan, something Ibn Saud was able to use to his advantage.

<sup>41</sup>Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, Report of Kuwait Conference, March 30, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P1992

<sup>42</sup>'Report on Ikhwan Attack' by Captain Driver, April 5, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P2065



case against Najd. They demanded payment of reparations and an apology before any further discussions could continue. By being uncompromising the Hashemites believed that they would eventually get their way.<sup>43</sup> This hard-line attitude did not endear them to Knox :

At the same time.....I cannot refrain from contrasting the scrupulously correct attitude, on the surface, of the Sultan of Najd and his delegates, their apparently earnest desire for peace and the sacrifices that they are prepared to submit to secure it with the childish and uncompromising attitude of the Hashemites. And the more Najd shows its desire for peace, the more the Hashemites harden their hearts.<sup>44</sup>

Despite further disruption the conference finally ended in April. Ibn Saud had been loath to apologise or to pay reparations. He absolved himself of responsibility claiming that the raid had been a reaction to attacks made by tribes based in Iraq. He asserted that al-Duwish "had no intention of attacking Iraq or her subjects....but merely of following the marauders who have fled Najd."<sup>45</sup> In a letter to the High Commissioner of Iraq, Ibn Saud stressed that he had tried to restrain his people, promising them that Britain would provide justice, but their patience had run out. If he had not been restraining his subjects, even more raids would have been conducted and it was with great difficulty that he was maintaining calm among his tribesmen.<sup>46</sup>

In fact Ibn Saud was financially and politically drained by conflicting demands; to face the challenge of the Hashemites; to reassure the British; and to satisfy the Ikhwan. Although they were an effective tool in bringing Britain to the negotiating table, the Ikhwan were unpredictable. Despite defending al-Duwish, Ibn Saud was troubled by the lack of control that he had over him and other Ikhwan. This was partially of his own

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<sup>43</sup> Agent Kuwait (Knox) to SOSCO, December 5, 1923, PRO CO 727/7 #59291. Knox reported that instructions had been sent from Sharif Hussein to the delegates at the conference to hold their position.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid,

<sup>45</sup> Letter to HCI in Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, May 2, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P2785

making since he had increased the levies and taxes imposed upon them. Some tribes fled to Iraq to escape the financial burden. However, the rise in levies had been necessary to offset the loss of income caused by the end of the British subsidy in March 1924.<sup>47</sup> Ibn Saud also forced the diversion of caravan traffic to ports of Jubail and al-Qatif and away from Kuwait in order to gain revenue from customs dues and port fees. This again hit tribal livelihood; the transport and smuggling of goods from Kuwait into Najd.<sup>48</sup>

The financial troubles of Ibn Saud was good news to Major Frank Holmes. Hearing of the end of the British subsidy the New Zealand prospector made his way back to see Ibn Saud in the hopes that he might be successful in securing an oil concession for his Eastern and General Syndicate. Holmes was offering an annual payment for the concession rights and believed that Ibn Saud would now be more amenable to deal with him. This time, Ibn Saud agreed to Holmes' proposal despite Percy Cox's earlier warning. Cox was right about one thing. The Eastern and General Syndicate did try to sell the rights to other companies, but since it could find no other companies interested, and not having the resources to explore the for oil itself, the concession was left undeveloped. Holmes became involved in what seemed to be more promising oil exploration around the island nation of Bahrain and let the annual payment to Riyadh lapse thus suspending his concessionary rights. Had Anglo-Persian beaten Holmes to the concession they would have had much better resources with which to search for oil and it is more likely that they would have been the first to discover 'black gold'. This in turn would have meant greater British attempts at controlling Ibn Saud and would have left little room for

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph, Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 p.92. Hereafter cited as MOSA.

<sup>48</sup> Report on Ibn Saud, Barrett, Political Resident, Bahrain, March 3, 1928, IOR R/15/5/90, cited by Kostiner, MOSA, p.81. Note: This author searched India Office record #R/15/5/90 but could not locate this report.



American oil companies to enter as they did in the 1930's.<sup>49</sup> This was an example of Ibn Saud's willingness to snub Britain. He agreed to grant the oil concession to Holmes despite Cox's demands that he not do so.

### The Issue of the Caliphate

By March 1924, much more significant events had occurred which were to change the shape of the Arab and Islamic world. Kemal Atturk, the new Turkish leader, abolished the Caliphate and declared Turkey a secular republic. As Dutch explorer Van Der Meulen pointed out; "since the death of the Prophet, Islam had never been without a *Khalifa*".<sup>50</sup> The Caliph was the spiritual, as well as the political head of the Islamic nation (*ummah*). Though weakened through the centuries, the institution of the Caliphate had been in existence since the beginning of Islam. This was the final end of the Ottoman empire and the ushering in of the age of Kemalism.<sup>51</sup>

Hussein saw this as a great opportunity to ascend to an even higher position than Sharif of Mecca or King of Hijaz. Asserting his descent from the family of the Prophet and the guardian of the Holy Cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, Hussein sought the title of Caliph. Yet his reputation as a miser and a ruthless ruler meant there was not much chance that, either the locals, or the international Muslim community would support his claim. Hussein sought the aid of his son Abdullah who the British had ensconced in Trans-Jordan as the Amir. A campaign was launched in the

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<sup>49</sup> Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.172. November 1923 also saw the arrival in Jeddah of Charles Crane—a curious American who had played a small part in the post war settlements of the Middle East. Crane was a former U.S. ambassador, millionaire and contributor to the Democratic party. He was part of the King-Crane Commission set up by the Supreme Council at Versailles to look into the aspirations of the people in the Arab provinces taken from the Ottoman empire after the First World War. Crane had travelled through Lebanon and Syria where he developed a dislike for the French. In this trip he visited Sharif Hussein but would later be a great friend to Ibn Saud and benefactor of the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. See Bullard, *Two Kings*, p. 23. George Antonius dedicated his famous book *The Arab Awakening*, to Charles Crane.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel, Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, London, John Murray, pp.90-91

<sup>51</sup> Thomas, Arnold, *The Caliphate*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, pp.189-200. Arnold provides insight into European conceptions of the Caliphate. The Ottoman Empire fell gradually. By the 19th and early 20th centuries with loss of territory, prestige, and economic problems many Muslims had "lost sight of its true significance and most Westerners had never understood it", Van Der Muelen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, p.90-91

local press to support Hussein for the Caliphate. From Amman he also worked to build up his image in Syria and Iraq where his son Faisal, was king.

After launching a bogus media campaign Hussein declared on March 14, 1924, that he had been asked by the *ummah* to become Caliph. It was ironic that Sharif Hussein could claim his pure Islamic intentions when he had needed the help of a Christian power to maintain his control of the holy cities.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Hijazi newspapers printed dozens of dubious congratulatory telegrams supposedly from around the Muslim world. Lists of pilgrims from India and Indonesia were presented as evidence of the support for Hussein as Caliph, although Muslims made no public declarations in those countries. Young religious students from Malaya who were studying in Mecca, and who gave oaths of allegiance to Hussein were hailed as proof that the five million strong Muslims of the Malay Peninsula had accepted Hussein as Caliph. The British Minister in Jeddah, Reader Bullard noted Hussein's trickery:

his newspapers, written either by him or under his supervision, lavish on him in every other line the title he loves; and when pilgrims come to Mecca from countries where he is not recognised they are not in a position to oppose him; and as likely as not he will get out of them something which he will call recognition and which they will have much difficulty in disclaiming afterwards. He is an extraordinarily clever old bird, and he knows as well as anyone the value of the *fait accompli*. His newspapers are full of alleged oaths of allegiance, and though many of them are known not to be genuine it would be hard to disprove them and they may be taken at their face value in some of the places to which copies of the papers are sent as propaganda.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>The date when Hussein announced his ascension to the Caliphate varies. Lacey (p. 185) and McLoughlin (p.77) and Troeller (p.209) assert the date was March 5, 1924 while Van der Meulen, p.92 asserts it was March 14, 1924. Troeller also claims that Hussein was reluctant to take over the role and that Abdullah pushed him into it. This does not seem consistent with other accounts.

<sup>53</sup>Bullard, Monthly Report to Foreign Office, January 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, pp. 33-35. For another view of Hussein see Suleiman Mousa "A Matter of Principle: King Hussein of the Hijaz and the Arabs of Palestine" in *Int'l Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 9 1978 pp. 183-193.



Much of the Muslim world was surprised by these developments; first, the abolition of the Ottoman dynasty and then Hussein's bid for the Caliphate. Many who had been on pilgrimage to Mecca experienced the harshness of the Sharif's corrupt system. In fact, the large Muslim population of India was critical of Hussein, believing him to have been installed as part of a British conspiracy to hijack the Caliphate.<sup>54</sup> Even more incensed were the Ikhwan of Najd. They were ready to take Hijaz and remove Hussein but were restrained by Ibn Saud. Rumblings of dissent grew within their ranks.

In June 1924, Ibn Saud held a conference of *ulema* and tribal chiefs to obtain a consensus on the type of response to employ against Hussein.<sup>55</sup> Instead of chairing the meeting himself, Ibn Saud gave his ageing father, Abdul Rahman the honour, knowing that the elderly Sheikh would command greater respect and be able to maintain order amongst the angry gathering. Ibn Saud could also have been distancing himself in case the meeting did not go in his favour.

The conference resulted in a decision to send a message to the Muslim community at large detailing Hussein's crimes and declaring him unfit for the position of *Khalifa* (Caliph). It was announced that the people of Najd would remove Hussein on behalf of the larger Muslim *ummah*. But again, Ibn Saud was careful to place the name of his second son Faisal as the author of the message. Many of the seventy million strong Muslim community of India responded enthusiastically to the Najdi proposal. This endorsement coupled with that of the chiefs and *ulema* of Najd gave Ibn Saud the support he required to move against Hussein.

### The Conquest of Hijaz

The relationship between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussein had always been stormy. Hussein was resentful of the fact that Britain had subsidised Ibn

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<sup>54</sup> Viceroy, India to SOSFI, September 25, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P3890.

<sup>55</sup> Troeller states that it was Abdul Rahman who called the meeting. However, it was merely a formality and Ibn Saud was the real instigator of the event. See Troeller, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 216. Van der Meulen supports the view that it was Ibn Saud who organised the gathering, Van der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, p.93.

Saud and had abandoned commitments he thought had been made to him, for an independent Arab state. The Sharif was arrogant and condescending towards Ibn Saud in a deliberate attempt to be insulting.<sup>56</sup> He considered the King of Najd little more than an ambitious desert chieftain and did much to humiliate and harass Ibn Saud; he tried to starve tribes outside Hejaz who were under Ibn Saud's protection; and for several years refused to allow Najdi's to make the pilgrimage. While Ibn Saud would send respectful letters to Hussein, referring to him as King of Hijaz, Hussein would respond discourteously and deliberately tried to cause offence.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn Saud, while believing in his family's hereditary rights to Najd, was very much cognisant of Britain's control over who rose and fell in Arabia. He did not want to risk openly breaking with Hussein in case that strengthened British support for the Sharif. Though more cautious and diplomatic than his rival, he often found Hussein meddling in his affairs. This included attempts to bribe tribal chiefs to revolt against Najd. Complaints that Ibn Saud addressed to London seemed to be ignored. It became clear that he would have to act himself to eliminate the Sharifian threat.<sup>58</sup> Ibn Saud knew that Britain's subsidy to Hussein would end on March 31, 1924 but he was not sure what security guarantees had been given to the Sharif.<sup>59</sup> If he launched an assault on Hijaz would Britain rush to Hussein's aide?.

The possibility of a move on Hijaz was not lost on the British administration in India. It was feared that Indian Muslims would react

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, September 23, 1924, L/P&S/10/1124/P4617; Also Randall, Baker, *King Hussein and the Kingdom of Hejaz*, New York: Oleander Press, 1979, pp.200-201.

<sup>57</sup> Bullard to Ramsay Macdonald (FO), September 21, 1924 L/P&S/10/1124/P4232.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, September 23, 1924, L/P&S/10/1124/P4617 and also Bullard to MacDonald, September 21, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P4232. Observations by various British officials noted that Hussein and Hashemite representatives often displayed openly their contempt for those of beduin background. Centuries of being the ruling class of Hejaz had created a superiority complex which did not always endear them locally. See Hafiz, Wahba, *Arabian Days*, pp.79-81. See also Knox to SOSCO, March 30, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1034/P1992.

<sup>59</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.72.



strongly against such a move. His Majesty's Government could be blamed for any fall of the Holy Cities:

The failure of a Muslim power to protect the Holy Places against a Wahabi invader might have rent Islam in twain, but it would have meant merely a schism within Islam itself. The failure of a Christian Power to protect the Holy Places against the Wahabis ....would be fraught with consequences difficult to exaggerate.<sup>60</sup>

In order to assess the extent of British support Ibn Saud moved gradually. His first objective was against the Hijazi summer capital, Taif, which was several miles outside Mecca.<sup>61</sup> To distract attention from the real plan, three groups of Ikhwan fighting forces were assembled in late August 1924. One was to attack Iraq, the other, Transjordan, while the main force would hit Taif. Unable to agree as to whether Faisal or Saud (the elder sons of Ibn Saud) should lead the Taif attack neither was sent. Leadership was split among Khalid ibn Luayy, and Sultan ibn Humayd, both *amirs* of Ikhwan settlements.<sup>62</sup>

On the first day of September the Ikhwan forces fought and defeated a unit of Hussein's army led by his son, Ali outside the Taif fortress. Ali and his remaining men retreated into the walled city and prevented inhabitants from leaving while the Ikhwan lay siege to the city. Three days later they themselves sneaked out under the cover of darkness leaving Taif undefended. They fled without their supplies, guns and ammunition. According to most accounts, the Ikhwan forces rampaged through the town, killing 'disbelievers' and destroying property. Reports circulated that the Ikhwan charged into the city killing and looting indiscriminately. When news of Taif's fall reached Jeddah panic ensued. The British Minister, Reader Bullard, was neither surprised nor disappointed:

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from Government of India to SOSI, July 5, 1923, IOR L/P&S/10/938/P2733

<sup>61</sup> Baker, *King Hussein and the Kingdom of Hejaz*, p.201. Also Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 215-216, and Troeller, *Birth of Saudi Arabia*, p.216

<sup>62</sup> Joseph, Kostiner, 'On Instruments and their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State' pp. 298-323.

It looks as though the Wahabis.....have pushed King Hussein out of Taif.....Serves him right. He has made no attempt to come to an agreement with the Wahabi leader, Bin Saud, and as you know has not troubled to keep the loyalty of his own people. The towns people detest him and ....he has alienated the tribes. It would serve him right if he were pushed out altogether. The Wahabis are very rigid Moslems-don't allow smoking, insist on regular attendance at the mosque, and so on; but the Hijaz people are so sick of King Hussein that they would welcome almost any change.<sup>63</sup>

In his own report to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Ibn Saud claimed that Hussein's men had instigated matters by attacking the Ikhwan outside Taif. His men had defended themselves and routed the Sharif's forces.<sup>64</sup> When challenged with reports of Ikhwan atrocities, Ibn Saud asserted that the Ikhwan had "safeguarded to their utmost the lives and property of the people".<sup>65</sup>

By defending his position and accusing Hussein of treachery, the Saudi leader sought to deflect British criticism. He was particularly concerned lest he be found guilty of violating the 1915 Treaty of Darin in which he had agreed not to attack Britain's allies. He sought to plead self defence and convince British officials that Hussein posed a threat to him. In fact, Ibn Saud was perhaps too concerned, for Hussein had fallen considerably in British eyes. The Sharif had stubbornly refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles, probably out of anger over the lack of support for his pan-Arab ambitions. Thus, Hussein had no solid agreements or treaties with Britain. An Anglo-Hijazi Treaty did exist but Hussein had quarrelled over its details and had never signed it.<sup>66</sup> Ibn Saud however, was not aware

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<sup>63</sup>Bullard to FO, Letter of September 9, 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings* p.56.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, September 27, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/ P4617. In the 1124 file series, there is much correspondence devoted to arguments of whether or not the few Indians killed in Taif were British subjects, and if they were, how should His Majesty's Government react. Hussein's losses and the implications of the defeat to Hussein's position did not warrant as much attention.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Saud to Pol.Res. PG, October 4, 1924. L/P&S/10/1124/P4617.

<sup>66</sup>Under the provisions of the treaty Hussein would have to forfeit all claims to Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and give up any hope that they would be granted to a Hashemite ruler. Under Article 4 of the treaty Britain would mediate in case of a dispute between



of these issues and was still wary. He was in no rush to test the British, so his forces took Taif and stopped there.

Meanwhile at the Colonial Office, officials were reluctant to pin the blame for the attack on Ibn Saud. Since they could not establish the extent that he was personally involved, there was no advantage in threatening him; unless His Majesty's Government was actually prepared to act upon it. The Colonial Office informed the Indian Government: "It is in the opinion of the Secretary of State, out of the question that His Majesty's Government should in any case embark upon hostile action against Ibn Saud, whether direct or indirect, in defence of the Holy Places."<sup>67</sup>

This left the people of Hijaz caught in a stand-off between Sharif Hussein and Ibn Saud. A waiting game ensued. Reader Bullard criticised local notables for not acting to end the tension. They came "snivelling round to me wanting H.M.G. to pull them out of the mess".<sup>68</sup> Hussein had tried unsuccessfully to get some of the beduin tribes of Hijaz to go out and fight against Ibn Saud but they were not interested, as for years Hussein had forced the tribes to live on meagre rations and false promises and no tribesmen wanted to die for Hussein.

Finally, a group of townsmen acted to end the stalemate. A delegation led by Abdullah Alireza, a prominent merchant, approached Hussein on October 3, 1924, and urged him to abdicate in favour of his son Ali.<sup>69</sup> It was hoped that Ali would not incite the anger of Ibn Saud and perhaps could negotiate to keep the Najdi forces from attacking. Yet in Bullard's dispatches it was reported that Ali himself called the prominent men of Jeddah and Mecca to meet with him whereupon he informed them that the Sharif was willing to step down in his favour if that would help the

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Hejaz and Najd. As Ibn Saud gained more influence Hussein became willing to sign but by then Britain was not interested; L/P&S/10/1124/P4274, Naji al-Assil (Governor of Hijaz) to SSFA 15 October 1924; See Helms, *Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, p.216; Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1991 p.184.

<sup>67</sup> Colonial Office to India Office, September 23, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/3855.

<sup>68</sup> Letter of 5 October, 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.63.

<sup>69</sup> McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*. p. 78.

situation. The group agreed and then spoke to Hussein via telephone after which Hussein agreed to abdicate.<sup>70</sup> Ali in the meantime tried to negotiate with Ibn Saud, sending several letters to the Saudi leader. However, each messenger was arrested upon arrival and the letters torn up, unread.<sup>71</sup>

Despite Ali's statement, Hussein was reluctant to give up power. It took much pressure from his son before he acquiesced and agreed to leave Hijaz for Transjordan. On the steamer that came to take him away were containers loaded with gold—the takings from years of fleecing pilgrims, local merchants and skimming from British payments to finance the Arab Revolt.<sup>72</sup> Although Hussein wanted to stay with his son Abdullah in Transjordan, Britain was concerned that the Sharif's presence there could incite an Ikhwan attack on the mandate. Instead Hussein was sent to Aqaba on the northern tip of the Red Sea. British policy was in a quandary. With the weakening of the Hashemite family there was a reluctance to openly continue its support.

One issue was the possible backlash from Indian Muslims. They had not been in favour of Hussein's revolt against the Ottoman Sultan and were further incensed by his claim to being Caliph. Moreover, many Indian pilgrims had over the years suffered under Hussein's extortion schemes and profiteering from the pilgrimage. The Indian Caliphate Committee had warned British authorities to stay out of the problem. His Majesty's Government was informed that: "in no case can British or other non-Muslim intervention in the sanctuary of Islam be tolerated by Muslims of India and of the world."<sup>73</sup> No other issue, whether safety of pilgrim routes or of British Indian subjects in Hijaz, could be more important than the

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<sup>70</sup> Bullard to Ramsay MacDonald, 'Report on Taif' October 11, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P4421.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Bullard to MacDonald, 'Report for Oct. 11-20, 1924', IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P4481. See also McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.78, and Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, p.95.

<sup>73</sup> Telegram from Shaukat Ali, President of Caliphate Committee, Delhi to British Prime Minister, 10 Downing St., London, 4 October 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1125/P4080. This created a flurry of exchanges between the Indian Government and London urging extreme caution in dealing with Hejaz.



"supreme importance of keeping Holy Land of Islam free from non-Muslim interference in any shape or under any pretext." If any one from outside the Muslim world were to interfere, it would be regarded as "an act of hostility towards Islam".<sup>74</sup> Anxious officials at the Foreign Office felt it prudent for Britain to remain neutral and to wait and see what would happen in the Najd-Hijaz conflict. It was deemed to be an internal Muslim religious issue in which London wanted no part.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, Ibn Saud's forces entered Mecca on October 16, 1924 and met no resistance. Much of the population fearing a repeat of the Taif assault had fled. However, Ibn Saud waited almost two months before arriving in the city. He was cautiously surveying reactions to his capture of Islam's holiest city. From India the reports were favourable, and the British found that the Indian Khilafat Committee supported Ibn Saud's taking of Mecca, albeit because of their "deep seated hostility" towards Hussein.<sup>76</sup>

Meanwhile, the people of Jeddah were still uneasy. Although Hussein had been removed his son, Ali remained ensconced in the city where he still had a sizeable force. The British Consul wrote: "The local people, I think, prefer Ali to the Wahabis, as being less primitive and less strict in religious matters, but they don't intend to fight for him; and as they have failed to bring about the surrender of Jeddah they are running away."<sup>77</sup>

In an attempt to forestall panic Ibn Saud issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of the city reassuring them that their lives and property were safe; that he would not appoint a governor that they disliked and that they would be respected and not treated unjustly:

We do not want to occupy your country or to exercise sovereignty over you, nor is there any hostility between us. You are the inhabitants of the Holy Places and have a right to

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, pp.37-38.

<sup>76</sup> Viceroy, India to SOSFI (Secretary of State for India) September 25, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P3890.

<sup>77</sup> Letter of October 30, 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, p. 69.

our respect and reverence. We absolutely refuse to agree that either Hussein or any of his sons should exercise sovereignty over the Hedjaz; the method of administration of the country will be left for settlement by the Moslem world, whose decision shall be final.<sup>78</sup>

The port of Jeddah was still the primary source for much of the supplies and food for the holy city of Mecca. Ali planned to starve out Ibn Saud's forces by restricting the transport of grain into Mecca.<sup>79</sup> However many in Jeddah feared an assault by the Ikhwan in reprisal and were concerned at the possible starvation of family and friends in the holy city. The townspeople of Jeddah and local beduin found themselves caught in the middle and with little choice but to play each side of the conflict. Groups of Hijazi notables and beduin leaders would approach Ibn Saud hoping to secure their positions in case the Muwahhidun decisively took over. Then the same people would go and visit Ali promising their support to him in the event that he survived in power.

Suspicious of the loyalties of people in Jeddah, Ali had caravans travelling to Mecca from Jeddah raided in order to obtain the mail bags and ascertain what letters were being written to Ibn Saud.<sup>80</sup> The main tribe of the area, the Harb, numbered more than 20,000 and should have been a decisive force in the struggle for Hijaz. But the Harb were not united and some factions supported Ali in exchange for much-needed supplies. The Ikhwan had labelled them their enemies and whenever the Harb fought them they suffered severe defeats. Gradually the Harb tribesmen, although they supported Ali, lost any appetite for taking on the Najdi warriors.<sup>81</sup>

Ibn Saud waited in Mecca and had no desire to rush an assault on Jeddah. He was uncertain of what his Ikhwan soldiers might do in the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibn Saud's Proclamation to People of Jeddah: 7th Rabi al-Awwal, 1343 (October 16, 1924), in Bullard to Chamberlain, November 8, 1924 IOR L/P&S/10/1124 P4893.

<sup>79</sup> Bullard to MacDonald, Report for October 11-20, 1924 L/P&S/10/1124/P4481. See also Letter of October 19, 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.66.

<sup>80</sup> Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.69.



'liberal' town. Particular care would have to be taken due to the presence of many foreigners and diplomatic missions in the city. He was also disappointed that no other community, besides some from among Indian Muslims, was paying any attention to his call for an international Muslim conference to discuss the issue of the holy cities. Ibn Saud had hoped to obtain support from the broader Muslim community. The Indian Caliphate Committee was favourable to Ibn Saud only because it desired the independence of Hijaz. It saw Hussein as British agent who would incorporate Hijaz into the British Empire. Yet much of the rest of the Muslim community at large was embroiled in their own domestic political and social struggles and were not willing or able to come out to support him. The Javanese and Malay Muslims were silent and no significant leader in the Arab world came forth to endorse him.<sup>82</sup>

The siege of Jeddah lasted a year. Ibn Saud had wanted to avoid the risk of any casualties among foreign nationals that might elicit the intervention of other governments. Orders were issued to his soldiers not to attack main cities that were held by Ali, such as Jeddah, Medina, and Yanbu.<sup>83</sup> The siege strategy did involve sporadic shelling of Ali's troops, using Ottoman canon that the Ikhwan had captured in their various battles. The siege ended with Ali bankrupt and with little choice but to retire north to Transjordan where his father and brothers were ensconced.

By December 25, 1925, Ibn Saud had taken Jeddah, the last major city in Hijaz, putting an end to the Najd-Hijaz conflict. The citizens of Jeddah made it easier by agreeing to open the city gates so long as the Ikhwan did not enter into the town. With Hijaz under his control Ibn Saud appointed his second son, Faisal, as governor. Faisal's travels had given him broader insights into foreign ways and the Hijaz was 'foreign' in many

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<sup>81</sup> Bullard to Chamberlain, Report for Oct.31-Nov. 8, November 8, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124 P4893. Also Letter of November 18, 1924, cited in Bullard, *Two Kings*, p.73.

<sup>82</sup> Viceroy, India to SOSFI, September 25, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P3890

<sup>83</sup> Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.382-383.

respects. For the people of Hijaz Faisal's ability to converse in polished Classical Arabic as well as Beduin dialect made him easier to understand. His maternal grandfather's tutoring was paying off and foreign diplomats were relieved that they could communicate freely with the new *amir* of Hijaz.<sup>84</sup> It was observed by those not familiar with the beduin slang of Central Arabia that Ibn Saud was "very difficult to understand...especially as he speaks fast and clips his words".<sup>85</sup>

### Administering Hijaz

Ibn Saud had successfully taken over the major towns of Hijaz without significant casualties.<sup>86</sup> He started working to convince the local people of his good will by a combination of appeasement and force. He brought the ulema of Najd and Hijaz together in order to settle their differences and create an amicable relationship. The ulema of Hijaz were practical in their outlook towards the change in political leadership and pledged allegiance to Ibn Saud. A consultative council or *majlis al-shura* made up of merchants, ulema and notables of Mecca was also created. The *majlis* was a means for the locals to have direct access to the new ruler and a convenient tool for Ibn Saud to implement rulings.<sup>87</sup>

In light of his expanded realm Ibn Saud declared himself *malik al-hijaz wa sultan najd wa mulhaqatihah*: King of Hijaz and Sultan of Najd and its dependencies.<sup>88</sup> This immediately alarmed the India Office and the Government of India. The Viceroy sent a telegram to London expressing

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<sup>84</sup>Sheean, *Faisal: The King and his Kingdom*, p. 81.

<sup>85</sup>Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, p.128.

<sup>86</sup>Wahba *Arabian Days*, p.154.

<sup>87</sup>The Hijazi ulema were quick to pledge their allegiance to the new ruler just as the Najd ulema had done to Ibn Saud over a decade earlier. This was in keeping with principles of Ibn Taymiya and the justification of preventing *fitna*. Ibn Saud however, did not appoint any Ikhwan to positions of power in Hijaz. See Bligh, *From Prince to King*, p. 23; Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p. 194 and Chapter 1 of this work.

<sup>88</sup>The reasons for Ibn Saud's use of the title 'King' are unclear. Perhaps he sought to minimize the use of an Islamic term because he did not want to be identified as having pretensions for pan-Arab or Islamic leadership. Thus avoiding Muslim political feuds and complicating his relationship with the British. McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.84; Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, p.59.



his serious distress over Ibn Saud's moves into Hijaz and proclamations of being ruler. As far as he was concerned Ibn Saud could speak;

merely as the ruler of Nejd and not as the holder, permanently or temporarily, of the Hedjaz. His possession of the Hedjaz has clearly brought about a completely different situation.... What was then appropriate is no longer appropriate when applied to Moslem Holy Land...<sup>89</sup>

The Indian Government was worried about the reaction of Muslims in India, fearing the perception that Britain was again meddling in the affairs of Muslims and was trying to take over Muslim holy cities. In London Foreign Office officials viewed the Viceroy's concern as unnecessary panic and believed that: "the Government of India are as timid as usual". The Colonial Office, however, took matters more seriously and called an interdepartmental meeting so that officers from the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and India Office could meet and decide how to deal with events in Hijaz. Foreign Office officials such as Louis Mallet and Oliphant wanted to postpone the meeting until Clayton came back from Arabia. However, Clayton would be spending time in Yemen and it would be another month before he returned. Shuckburgh at the Colonial office did not wish to wait so long and was annoyed at the Foreign Office's relaxed attitude.<sup>90</sup>

Because of the overlap that existed in departmental jurisdictions the Foreign Office and Colonial Office had to co-operate. This was not always conducive to smooth policy making. On one occasion the Foreign Office sent the Colonial office a copy of a telegram which it planned to send to convey HMG's appreciation to Ibn Saud. The Colonial Office did not respond for several weeks and this frustrated Foreign Office figures like Oliphant who remarked:

It is really very difficult to conduct affairs properly with Bin Saoud when we have to consult I.O. or C.O. In this case it has

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<sup>89</sup> Viceroy, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, to SOSI (Secretary of State for India) January 5, 1926, PRO FO 371/11437 E/180/180/91.

<sup>90</sup> Shuckburgh Minute FO 371/11437 E/322/180.

required three weeks to obtain C.O. concurrence in a short draft telegram. Such delay must inevitably diminish the good effects of our attitude on an Arab Chieftain who has not had experience of a multitude of government offices.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile having heard no reply from London or indication as to when things would be resolved Ibn Saud acted to enhance his position as best he could. Keeping in contact with the new British Consul, Stanley Jordan in Jeddah, he sought to provide the British with more incentives to support him. Ibn Saud casually mentioned in conversation to Jordan the increase in Communist activity in the region. Russia was supplying a great deal of money and arms to the revolt in Syria. In fact, Ibn Saud told the Consul, he himself had been approached several times to provide assistance, but had refrained from getting involved out of respect for Britain. Ibn Saud reassured Jordan that he "intended to follow British policy in all respects as regards that part of the world".<sup>92</sup> With even greater flair and drama Ibn Saud provided a sensitive piece of information which he told the consul was a great secret, obtained from reliable sources, and for the British government only — that the headquarters of the Bolshevik organisation was located in the Persian consulate in Damascus. This information and the attitude of Ibn Saud surprised the Consul:

He expressed great concern for Trans-Jordan and Palestine, and earnestly wishes to warn the British Government of danger from that quarter where, he stated, Bolshevik money and influence were gaining ground. He several times reiterated this warning and appeared most sincere.<sup>93</sup>

Having recently made conquests deep into Hijaz, which bordered Transjordan Ibn Saud was clearly concerned about calming British fears and securing their assistance. He assured Jordan of his friendship towards Britain and of the accuracy of his information. Perhaps he was also hoping

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<sup>91</sup> Oliphant Minute, 10 February, 1926, in PRO FO 371/11437 E/902/180.

<sup>92</sup> Acting Consul, Jordan, British Agency (Jeddah) to Chamberlain SSFA (Sec.State for Foreign Affairs). December 29, 1925. PRO FO 371/11437 E/364/180.



to involve himself in northern affairs. He told Stanley Jordan he was confident that Iraq would see few problems, "no trouble was to be feared there". Jordan was surprised when the King offered assistance in case trouble broke out in Transjordan. However, Ibn Saud kept the most alarming news for last—that a Bolshevik envoy had approached the Saudi *amir* with a surprisingly generous offer of money, arms, ammunition and even aircraft. When Ibn Saud inquired about what he would have to do in return, the envoy simply stated "to make trouble with the British".<sup>94</sup>

This confirmed existing suspicions among officials in London that Russian-sponsored activity in Hijaz was increasing. It was feared that the King might fall "under the sway of anti-British propaganda" unless there was a British official at the court in Riyadh.<sup>95</sup> The problem was that such an officer would have to be senior enough to command the respect of Ibn Saud. Yet which senior officer would be able to live in harsh conditions in the Najdi capital. Moreover, there were disagreements over which department would finance the posting of an official to the King's court.<sup>96</sup>

This incident was a prime example of Ibn Saud's diplomacy. He had proclaimed his loyalty to Britain and hinted at enticements from Russia. It was designed to elicit greater British interest and it proved a successful strategy in regard to Foreign Office officials. Louis Mallet found Ibn Saud's attitude "surprisingly frank for an Arab" and "evidently strongly anti-Bolshevik". Mallet believed that: "it was most advantageous that we should now be in personal touch with ibn Saud through S. Jordan.....I submit that it is entirely in our own interest to keep on the most friendly terms with him [Ibn Saud]".<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Consul Jeddah, Jordan, to SSFA, December 29, 1925, PRO FO 371/11437 E/364/180.

<sup>95</sup> CO to FO April 30, 1925, IOR L/P&S/10/938/P1339.

<sup>96</sup> Disagreements between IO, CO, FO, in IO Department Minute, March 3, 1924 IOR L/P&S/10/938/P989.

<sup>97</sup> Mallet's Minute, in Dispatch from CO to FO, December 16, 1925, PRO FO 371/11437 E/322/180.

The fact that Ibn Saud appeared to be cooperating in attempts to settle the boundary issues of Iraq and Transjordan increased his credibility. But in reality Ibn Saud hoped to push Britain out of its position of neutrality in the Najd—Hejaz conflict to one that would provide positive support for him. It was strategy that worked—Foreign Office official D.G. Osborne commented: “we should exploit Mr. Saud’s friendly disposition to the utmost. There is every indication that he will be a more reliable and valuable friend than Hussein”.<sup>98</sup>

Mallet, Osborne, and others were pleased at the friendly attitude and helpfulness of Ibn Saud. The fact that this display of affection for Britain came shortly after Ibn Saud made requests for a new treaty, arms and financial support, upon which the Foreign Office was still at that time debating, did not raise eyebrows. Even Louis Mallet whose Foreign Office minutes were frequently sarcastic and pessimistic, took Ibn Saud at face value.<sup>99</sup>

With it apparent that Ibn Saud was now in de facto control of Hijaz, it became time to repair relations before his confidence encouraged him to expand even further. Gilbert Clayton was selected to lead a mission to Ibn Saud.<sup>100</sup> When Clayton arrived in December 1925, the King himself was anxious to update his status. Under the terms of the previous 1915 Treaty of Darin, Ibn Saud was to refrain from correspondence or entering into treaty relations with any foreign power other than Britain. He was unable to cede, sell, mortgage, lease or otherwise dispose of any of his territories to a foreign power without British consent.<sup>101</sup> Ibn Saud now argued that this agreement was made during the height of the First World War when the

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<sup>98</sup> Osborne Minute, commenting on Jordan to SSFA report of December 29, 1925, PRO FO 371/11437 E/364/180/91.

<sup>99</sup> Clive Leatherdale notes that British officials could at times be patronising or condescending towards Arabs and their mentality. See Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, p. 96. This reinforces the point of this work that British officials often failed to appreciate the guile which Arab leaders like Ibn Saud employed to their advantage.

<sup>100</sup> Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, p.72. Clayton had been the Director of Military Intelligence, British Army, Egypt, during WWI.

<sup>101</sup> Mallet, Memorandum, March 8, 1926, PRO FO 371/11437 E/1738/180/91.



situation was vastly different. Though he was "sincerely anxious for complete understanding and co-operation with Great Britain" Ibn Saud required a more "sound" agreement with His Majesty's Government.<sup>102</sup> Clayton was obliging and inquired about the areas that the King wished to have revised in the treaty.

Ibn Saud made three points. First, he sought to have Najd formally recognised as an independent state. This would involve removing the clauses that prevented relations with other powers and from ceding, selling or giving concessions to foreign governments. Second, the right to import arms because weapons were an important part of desert life. Finally, he made a request for financial assistance. This was needed to compensate the tribes that had been ordered to stop raiding into neighbouring states. They had to be compensated for the loss of their traditional means of livelihood. Ibn Saud was also concerned about Hashemite intrigue against him and sought firm commitments from Britain. Already, during the previous summer, the Hashemite ruler in Transjordan had annexed the important cities of Maan and Akaba in the north-west of Hijaz.

In London the reaction to these requests was mixed. The Foreign Office was agreeable to the recognition of Najd's independent status but was not enthusiastic about the other two requests. In the case of supplying arms, there was uncertainty as to the extent to which Ibn Saud exercised control over the tribes. A Foreign Office minute expressed the concern that : "there is no regular Najdian army, and the tribes will be armed by Ibn Saud and may then get out of hand and raid into British mandated territories".<sup>103</sup> On the issue of financial assistance, it was not considered appropriate to begin another subsidy policy, as with the capture of the

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<sup>102</sup> CO dispatch to FO, including Clayton report to CO dated December 16, 1925, FO 371/11437 E/322/180.

<sup>103</sup> Mallet, Minute in Dispatch from CO to FO, December 16, 1925, PRO FO 371/11437 E/322/180.

Holy cities Ibn Saud should gain enough revenue from pilgrimage and as such "he may be in less need of money".<sup>104</sup>

This was far from the truth. Ibn Saud had spent a great deal of his resources in laying siege to Hijazi cities and providing largesse to the local tribes. The pilgrim traffic had slowed due to the uncertain political situation. These factors were not at the forefront of Foreign Office considerations.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, Clayton found accommodation with Ibn Saud and reached a new agreement known as the Treaty of Jeddah. Under this treaty, signed on May 20, 1927, Britain recognised the "complete and absolute independence of the dominions of his majesty the King of Hijaz and of Najd and its Dependencies".<sup>106</sup> There would be a state of "peace and friendship" between Ibn Saud and Britain. However, the pledge to come to the defence of Ibn Saud in case of attack was withdrawn. This was still a triumph for Ibn Saud. Not only had he expanded his empire at the expense of the Hashemites, but he had also obtained British recognition as an independent ruler. This achievement however, would bring him into conflict with his own men — the Ikhwan.

### The Ikhwan Revolt

Following the conquest of Hijaz, Ibn Saud spent more than 18 months consolidating his position. He appointed judges from the Najdi ulema, governors from his extended family and gave senior positions to loyal Hijazi notables in town councils and local administrations. Yet the Ikhwan chiefs did not get any positions of authority. They were thanked for their services, given gifts of cloth, livestock and food and sent back to their *hijras* in the interior.<sup>107</sup> For those who had given up their traditional beduin life in the cause of Ikhwan beliefs and had vowed to spread the faith this was a frustrating anti-climax. Not only had their *jihad* been halted but the

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia* p.216.

<sup>106</sup> Article 1, Treaty of Jeddah, May 20, 1927, text in IOR L/P&S/10/1166/P4518.

<sup>107</sup> See Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.90 and Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.154.



innovations of the disbelievers were still present. In fact some of the 'innovations', such as the motorcar, telephone, and telegraph, system that were already used in the Hijaz were incorporated by Ibn Saud into his new administrative structure and he expanded the network of telegraph lines to Najd as well.

These inventions topped the list of complaints of the Ikhwan. A petition of grievances, whose chief signatory was none other than Faisal al-Duwish, was sent to Ibn Saud. Besides the complaints of foreign inventions such as automobiles, telegraph and telephones, taxes were too high and the disbelieving tribes of Iraq and Transjordan were permitted to graze their herds in Ikhwan territory.<sup>108</sup> In an attempt to pacify the situation Ibn Saud defended his position by stating that the *ulema* had not found anything wrong with the devices. However, this was not a satisfactory response and several incidents occurred where telephone wires were cut and automobiles smashed.

Dissatisfaction with the response of the King led al-Duwish to increase his raids into Iraqi and Transjordanian territory to defy the treaties made with the 'disbelievers'. In Iraq he attacked settlements of the Zayyad, Yajeeb and Beni Salama tribes. From Hail, al-Duwish raided into Transjordan and terrorised the local Ruwalla tribe. While he did not always lead the attacks, members of his tribe, the Mutayr, were actively involved. The frequency of the raids led Abdullah, ruler of Transjordan to note with alarm that many of his beduin were on the verge of joining the Ikhwan simply to protect themselves from attack.<sup>109</sup> Although he desperately wished to counter attack, Abdullah was instructed to restrain his men. The Colonial Office did not want to provide Ibn Saud with any justification for launching more attacks into Transjordan or Iraqi territory.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p. 133; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.93.

<sup>109</sup> Amir Abdullah to HC (High Commissioner), Amman, February 1925, IOR L/P&S/1125/P768.

<sup>110</sup> SOSCO to High Commissioner, Palestine, February 25, 1925, IOR L/P&S/10/1125/P585.

Lieutenant John Bagot Glubb was the 'Special Service Officer—Ikhwan Defence' on the Iraqi frontier. He witnessed the aftermath of the raids:

Along the whole length of the Nejed frontier from Basra to near Nejef the shattered and terrified remains of the Iraq sheperd tribes arrived back in panic and confusion on the banks of the Euphrates....several hundred Iraqis had been massacred and many thousands of sheep had been looted, not to mention donkeys, tents, clothing, food utensils, and money. It was a devastating blow.<sup>111</sup>

With the loss of so many men, families were left in desperation. Women and children were "orphaned, widowed, half naked and utterly destitute. The Ikhwan despoiled women of their outer garments and jewellery."<sup>112</sup> Yet there seemed to be little sympathy from Baghdad since: "The Iraq government regarded tribes and tribal raiding with aversion and resentment. They disliked their own beduin almost as much as they did those of Ibn Saud, and desired a plague on all their houses".<sup>113</sup>

As a result of these raids Iraqi tribes became disillusioned with the British and Iraqi governments and sceptical of their promises of protection. Some tribesmen decided that the best course was to appeal directly to Saudi authorities for help against attack, since it was assumed that Riyadh was orchestrating al-Duwish's raids. Finding a sympathetic listener in the *amir* of Hail, who was also a cousin of Ibn Saud, the Iraqi tribes were offered immunity from Ikhwan raids in return for the payment of tax to Saudi coffers. Other Iraqi tribes chose instead to engage in counter-attacks of their own which escalated hostilities and led to counter raids. Lt. Glubb and other British officials were sceptical of Ibn Saud's claims that al-Duwish and other Ikhwan were operating contrary to orders, especially after immunity was granted to some Iraqi tribes in return for taxation.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>John Bagot Glubb, *War in the Desert*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960, pp.136-138.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.* Glubb did not report receiving any complaints of rape or assault on women which surprised him.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>114</sup>Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p.140.



Ibn Saud's response was to claim that Iraqi raids into Najd territory had compelled the Ikhwan to respond in the manner which they did. In fact he consistently maintained that it was attacks by tribes based in Iraq and Transjordan that was the true aggression, raiding his territories, killing dozens of people and capturing thousands of camels. Ikhwan raids were the result of the injustices committed against them and because Britain did nothing to prevent the attacks. Ibn Saud had tried restraint but he was not at fault if his people were angry and could wait no longer, their intention being only to recover their property.<sup>115</sup>

Ibn Saud had successfully used the Ikhwan on the battlefield to defeat Sharif Hussein and his family. Having created the Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd Ibn Saud wanted the Ikhwan to settle down and lead a sedentary life. The conquest of Hijaz however, gave Faisal al-Duwish no incentive to retire. Victory only increased his wish to settle the score against the British supported Iraqi and Transjordan regimes. Britain had created arbitrary borders which had disrupted traditional tribal migratory patterns. Yet Iraqi tribes had the ability to raid into Najd, flee across invisible borders and claim sanctuary under the Hashemite regime, with the added protection of the Royal Air Force (RAF). This was insulting to al-Duwish who felt that having humiliated the Hashemites and run them out of Hijaz there was no reason to be tolerant and respectful of their 'borders' in Iraq and Transjordan. Other Ikhwan chiefs such as Ibn Humayd of the Utayba and Dhaidan Ibn Hithlain of the Ajman supported him.<sup>116</sup>

Faisal al-Duwish believed that he was being treated unjustly.<sup>117</sup> He had fought many battles and led the sieges of Hail and Medina. Months

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<sup>115</sup> Ibn Saud to Political Resident, Gulf, September 17, 1924, IOR L/P&S/10/1124/P4617.

<sup>116</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.88; Howarth, *The Desert King* p.155.

<sup>117</sup> Letter of Faisal al-Duwish to Amir Saud, Riyadh, June 6, 1929, text in IOR R/15/2/92. Duwish complained about the prohibition on raiding and noted that he had left everything to fight for Ibn Saud. Meanwhile, Britain's every wish was being fulfilled. Ibn Saud was accused of preventing the Ikhwan from keeping with "both our religion and worldly concerns". The livelihood of many tribes had suffered because of the restrictive policies upon them. In the letter al-Duwish stated that if the Ikhwan were allowed to raid and had their past forgiven, he would renew his pledge of loyalty to Ibn Saud.

had been spent lying patiently in wait without raiding as ordered by Ibn Saud. Yet despite his successes Faisal was not rewarded with a position of power. He remained as before, chief of the small settlement of Artawiya. Now in the face of provocation by the British and tribes under Iraqi protection, he was still under orders to stand fast. A proud chief of the Mutayr tribe, Faisal could claim just as noble a descent as Ibn Saud. It became more and more difficult for him to accept that Ibn Saud had a right over him. al-Duwish was joined by other Ikhwan leaders with similar grievances against Ibn Saud, but not all of them were motivated by the same resentment and desire for power. Ibn Humayd of the Utayba was a devout Ikhwan follower who saw a dilution of Ikhwan ideals. He was critical of the leniency shown to the people and customs of Hijaz. Dhaidan Ibn Hithlain chief of the Ajman had a personal grudge against Ibn Saud. His tribe had been forced to join Ibn Saud because they were defeated in battle and he was always looking to free himself from subservience to Najd.<sup>118</sup>

These leaders and their tribes were at the forefront of the rebellion against Ibn Saud. Among the Ikhwan generally there was also the feeling that too much favour had been shown to the disbelieving 'Ingleezi' (English) the introduction of innovations such as the automobile and telegraph had been allowed. All signs that their leader was being swayed by the *mushrikeen*.

Tensions came to a head when in late September 1927, the Iraqi Border Police started to build a police post near Busaiya wells. It was the first of a series of posts that Baghdad wanted to build in order to extend the range of police patrols and deter Ikhwan raids from Najd.<sup>119</sup> Although the post was 115 kilometres inside Iraqi territory, Faisal al-Duwish saw this as a flagrant insult and an attempt by the 'unbelievers' to solidify their position in territory that was part of Mutayri tribal grounds. On November

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<sup>118</sup> Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam*, p. 127.



5, al-Duwish led an attack, destroying the police post and killing everyone there. Iraq and Britain made loud protests. Ibn Saud denied that he had authorised the raid, but claimed that Iraq had no right to build the fort in the first place. Its construction violated agreements made at Uqair which prohibited the establishment of military posts near the border. Supporters of al-Duwish came to Ibn Saud and urged that a campaign against Iraq be initiated. Though this was refused, the stipends of al-Duwish and the other Ikhwan involved in the raid were withheld. Orders were also issued that they remain in the settlement of Artawiya and prohibited them from leaving Najd. This did not stop the raids, as other Ikhwan took up the cause. The opportunity to inflict punishment on Iraqi tribes and gather booty for themselves were motivating factors.<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile reports reached Baghdad that Ikhwan raids on Shammar tribesmen inside Iraqi territory were inflicting heavy casualties. The British High Commission was flooded with complaints and reports indicating that "all the desert tribes in Iraq are in a state of extreme panic".<sup>121</sup> This placed British officers in Iraq in a "most humiliating position", as many of the tribesmen were critical of Britain's inability to protect them. Some chiefs were pledging to join the Ikhwan purely to prevent attacks on them. Also suspicions in ruling Iraqi circles were growing that Britain may be letting the Ikhwan raids occur to "remind Iraq of her dependence on the British".<sup>122</sup> For their part British officials felt that Ibn Saud's inability to control the Ikhwan was "merely a pretence" and that "he may, in fact, be conniving at these raids whilst at the same time he expresses his disapproval of them".<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Iraq Police Report of November 7, 1927 on Busaiyah raid, PRO FO 371/12241/E5228/56/91.

<sup>120</sup> Colonial Office to FO, December 6, 1927, PRO FO 371/12241/E5228/56/91. Also Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, pp. 224-225. Asad was with Ibn Saud during these troubles; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 93; Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.159.

<sup>121</sup> HCI to SOSCO, December 29, 1927, PRO FO 371/12241/ E5615/56/91.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> The problem was that the raids took place in a territory stretching over 600 miles and it was difficult to acquire up to date information about latest raids. In addition, officials were

Realising that he needed to diffuse tension with the British and put some restraints on Ikhwan activity, Ibn Saud called a conference in Riyadh. He invited chiefs, *ulema* and *amirs* of towns from across Arabia. Faisal al-Duwish refused to attend as did Ibn Humayd of the Utayba and Hithlain of the Ajman. This was a carefully organised event, tactfully designed to reinforce Ibn Saud's position. He would seek consensus and approval for his rule and satisfy the British that he was doing something about the Ikhwan. Those who attended were all reliant to a varying degree on the largesse extended to them by Ibn Saud. The subsidies of food, clothing and supplies provided by Ibn Saud enabled them to maintain loyalties within their own tribal areas.

In a grand gesture Ibn Saud declared that he would step down as ruler because he would not lead if they did not want him. This was of course, soundly opposed.<sup>124</sup> Ibn Saud was no fool and he would not have made such a move if he were not certain of the outcome. The gathered chiefs claimed that they did not want to hear of Ibn Saud's resignation but rather clarification from the *ulema* about the innovations' of the motor car, telegraph, and telephone. They also wanted an answer as to why there were forts being built in Iraq which were obstructing beduin migration and depriving access to water wells.

The *ulema* present were ready to answer in defence of the 'innovations' declaring that there was no prohibition to these inventions in Islam. They were being used for the benefit of people and therefore were lawful. As for the issue of the forts Ibn Saud pledged to get them removed over time. With the questions answered the Ikhwan leaders reaffirmed

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concerned about the Anaizah tribal grazing ground which extended from Trans-Jordan to Baghdad—a distance of some 800 miles and "though formerly peaceful and well disposed towards us, have within the past 6 or 9 months shown signs of coquetting with the Mutair tribe and of transferring their allegiance to Ibn Saud." If that occurred then this was a serious security threat. Because the loss of the Anaizah to the Ikhwan side would make it "impossible to maintain the trans desert route and the line of communications for reinforcements from Egypt, which is the whole basis of our power in Iraq." Trenchard Minute (Sir Hugh Trenchard), PRO FO 371/12241 E5615/56. See also HCI to SOSCO, January 17, 1925 IOR L/P&S/10/1125/P194.



their allegiance to Ibn Saud and declared that they would fight against al-Duwish who had unlawfully rebelled against his *amir*.<sup>125</sup> The meeting successfully provided Ibn Saud with a reaffirmation of his leadership and the condemnation of al-Duwish. It would now be safe to move against him.

Ibn Saud began raising a new force recruiting heavily from towns instead of Ikhwan settlements. He also provided motorised transport to give improved mobility that allowed him to take the battle to al-Duwish's own backyard—the field of Sabilah, just outside the settlement of Artawiya.<sup>126</sup> The advance of this new mobile force did not appear to faze Faisal al-Duwish. It had been years since Ibn Saud had fought on the battlefield and may have assumed that the large force was for show, and the King would negotiate his way out.

Since Ibn Saud had not previously moved against him, Duwish did not believe the King had the stomach for battle. However, Ibn Saud was determined to eliminate all threats to the stability of his young kingdom. He set up an ambush for the rebel forces and lured them into a crossfire of machine guns, slaughtering many of them before they fired a shot. When Ibn Saud sent his cavalry in to finish off the survivors the Ikhwan fled into the desert. Ibn Humayd managed to survive and flee the battlefield, but al-Duwish was badly wounded with a bullet in the stomach and was captured.<sup>127</sup>

Brought before Ibn Saud on a stretcher Faisal al-Duwish was in critical condition. The King's physician examined al-Duwish but did not give him more than a week to live. Feeling merciful Ibn Saud pardoned al-Duwish, allowing him to return to Artawiyah to die.<sup>128</sup> Hearing of the King's leniency, Ibn Humayd came out of hiding to surrender as well. However, in this case Ibn Saud decided to set an example. Ibn Humayd

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<sup>124</sup> Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia* p.254.

<sup>125</sup> Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam*, pp.121-135.

<sup>126</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, pp.168-169; Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.93.

<sup>127</sup> These accounts are told by a young Saudi official Mohammad Almana in *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, London: 1980, pp.106-112. See also Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, p. 225.

<sup>128</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 93.

was arrested and thrown into a Riyadh jail where he later died. Orders were issued for Ibn Humayd's settlement of Ghot Ghot to be razed as an example of how firm, as well as merciful, Ibn Saud could be.

Afterwards the King met with his men in the presence of the *ulema* where he reminded them that the religious scholars should make the rulings in matters of religion only. There was no room for the individual interpretation of religious texts. He was their ruler and they must obey him. The *ulema* were there for guidance and he would not tolerate any further attempts to call for *jihad* or revolt against the ruler.<sup>129</sup> Having removed the threat of rebellion, a relieved Ibn Saud went on a tour of the towns that had sent men to fight on his side in order to give thanks and distribute largesse. Then he headed back to Hijaz to be near the holy cities.

With the Ikhwan revolt defeated there was one remaining rebel leader. Dhaidan Ibn Hithlain of the Ajman, had remained in al-Hasa and had not been involved in Sabilah.<sup>130</sup> Realising that he was now alone he sought to make peace with Ibn Saud. Instead of going directly to the King, Dhaidan approached Fahd ibn Jiluwi, whose father Abdullah, was governor of al-Hasa and a cousin of the King, in the hope of negotiating a truce. However, the meeting went sour and Dhaidan was arrested. He warned that if he was not released his men would attack the camp. In response, Fahd ordered his men to execute Hithlain if any Ajman tribesmen approached. Not hearing from their chief and fearing the worst the Ajman tribesmen mounted their assault. In a ferocious attack the entire camp was overwhelmed. Fahd Ibn Jiluwi was killed along with over 1000 of his men.<sup>131</sup> Dhaidan Ibn Hithlain was also killed and this incident was a

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<sup>129</sup> Jakins to Chamberlain, May 25, 1929, IOR L/P&S/10/1240/P3908, cited in Kostiner, *MOSA*, p.137.

<sup>130</sup> Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* p. 304-305, and Habib, *Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, pp.268-270.

<sup>131</sup> The Political Agent in Kuwait was alarmed at the heavy losses reporting that the al-Hasa forces were "completely routed". Political Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, May 4, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92. See also, McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.108.



serious blow to Ibn Saud's position in al-Hasa, while its governor, Abdullah Ibn Jiluwi, was devastated by the loss of his son.

To complicate matters further, Ibn Saud learned that Faisal al-Duwish had not died from his wounds but had in fact recovered and had returned to his marauding ways. Faisal had joined with the now leaderless Ajman to form a Mutayr-Ajman alliance that attacked caravans and tribes loyal to Ibn Saud. They were joined by sections of Utayba who had been followers of the now deceased Ibn Humayd.<sup>132</sup>

The raids were characterised by a fierce brutality that was unlike the traditional beduin *ghazw* – where the emphasis was on booty and livestock. These raids were frenzied attacks. No quarter was given. All who were found were slaughtered and their bodies often mutilated.<sup>133</sup> The object was revenge, spreading fear and panic. Ironically, al-Duwish employed the same hit and run tactics that had been used by Iraqi tribes on him. He would attack and then cross into either Iraq where he could hide in the desert, or more often into Kuwait, where he could get supplies.

Ibn Saud discovered the Kuwaiti connection and was certain that the amir of Kuwait was encouraging the rebels. He complained to the British Agent that either his loyal forces be allowed the right of pursuit or the British should allocate forces to prevent entry into Kuwait.<sup>134</sup> The High Commissioner of Iraq was inclined to let Ibn Saud have his way and believed that there were grounds to justify permission to cross borders in pursuit.<sup>135</sup> But there was a danger in allowing free access across borders that had taken so long to be recognised. That might open the floodgates for other tribes to cross at will. Ibn Saud would be seen to gain prestige at the expense of Britain. The Resident in the Gulf thought it detrimental to

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<sup>132</sup> Political Agent, Jeddah to SOSCO, September 10, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92. Also reports that Utayba and sections of the Harb had also rebelled and attacked government property.

<sup>133</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p. 158. For a detailed look at beduin raiding etiquette see Dickson, *Arab of the Desert*, p.118-132 and Goldrup, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.271-273.

<sup>134</sup> Political Agent, Jeddah to FO, June 6, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>135</sup> HCI to SOSCO June 9, 1929, R/15/2/92.

British interests for Ibn Saud to be granted permission. To the Resident it was clear that Ibn Saud was:

seeking opportunities either openly or secretly to interfere in the Gulf principalities and the news that he has invaded Kuwait territory with the permission of His Majesty's Government because we were too weak to protect it would have extremely bad effect on our position throughout the Gulf. We may be sure that Nejd propaganda would stress Bin Saud's strength and our weakness.<sup>136</sup>

However, the Resident was under the authority of the Government of India whose concern was with the stability of the whole of eastern Arabia and the Persian Gulf and who worried about maintaining the independence of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. Foreign Office officials were more willing to give Ibn Saud the benefit of the doubt and believed a strong Saudi presence would maintain peace in Najd and Hijaz. The British in the Iraqi Government wanted to prevent raids on their tribes and to curtail Ibn Saud's power, fearing that an aggressive Saudi state would interfere in the mandated territories. At the same time the rebellion of al-Duwish was a real threat to stability in the whole area. The Air Ministry proposed using Royal Air Force planes to bomb the rebels. The RAF was agreeable but officers on the ground in Iraq warned about the difficulties of distinguishing between rebel forces and friendly Kuwaiti or Iraqi tribes from the air. Moreover, it could become a dangerous extension of British military power which might draw out the conflict rather than reduce it.<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, despite differing opinions over the extent to which Britain should become involved, it was agreed to provide Ibn Saud with weapons and ammunition so that he could attempt to put down the rebellion himself. This would allow the King to arm the increasing number of townspeople that he was recruiting into his forces and improve his chances of success against the rebels. Ibn Saud already had the advantage of being able to deploy trucks and motor cars, some mounted with

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<sup>136</sup> Political Resident, Gulf to SOSCO June 11, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.



machine guns. Communications had also improved between the various towns loyal to the king. Using the telegraph Ibn Saud was able to keep abreast of movements and sightings of rebel forces. In this way the King was able to follow the progress of a group of rebel forces moving north of Najd in the direction of Hail.

The offending party was led by al-Duwish's son, Abdul Aziz, with a large contingent of Mutayri tribesmen on a mission to gather booty. Though they were initially successful in their attacks around Hail, on their return they were intercepted by Ibn Saud's forces. Caught by surprise and exhausted from days of travelling the Mutayri's fought hand to hand in the blistering desert sun. The Saudi forces were fresh and outnumbered the rebels. The battle was a complete rout. Not only was it a huge defeat for Faisal al-Duwish but he was overcome with grief at the news that his son was killed in the fighting.<sup>138</sup>

Flush with success Ibn Saud went on the offensive. War parties were sent out from al-Hasa and Hail. Travelling in trucks the forces created a pincer movement on the rebel forces. The Saudi forces stalked al-Duwish, chasing him from oases to oases. Sensing that his time was running out Faisal al-Duwish, the once proud Mutayri chief, Ikhwan commander, and inveterate opponent of the British sought refuge with Harold Dickson, Political Agent, Kuwait. Al-Duwish claimed that his concern was for the fate of large numbers of women and children, numbering around 5000 as well as 9000 camels and 30,000 sheep.<sup>139</sup> He asked that the British Government grant protection to his women and children while he made off for Riyadh. The British reply was firm:

It should be made clear that His Majesty's government are not prepared to enter into any further discussions with Dawish who should be warned that if he himself or any of his emissaries cross Kuwait frontier again they will be liable to

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<sup>137</sup> HCI to SOSCO, June 20, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>138</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.167.

<sup>139</sup> Political Agent, Kuwait to Resident, Gulf, August 30, 1920, IOR R/15/2/92. Also Habib, *Ikhwan Movement of Najd*, p.280.

arrest or any other action that may be considered necessary.<sup>140</sup>

British resources were committed to assist Ibn Saud in quelling the rebellion. RAF planes had orders to chase out any of the rebels that crossed the borders. This allowed Ibn Saud to squeeze al-Duwish towards the British lines.<sup>141</sup> The rebels were rapidly running out of places to hide. al-Duwish gathered his remaining men and told them that no help was forthcoming from Iraq or Kuwait and that they should move westwards towards Syria. However, his men were tired and fearful of a future on the run. Many opted to surrender to Ibn Saud rather than flee with their leader.<sup>142</sup>

al-Duwish also decided to follow suit. Rather than attempt to approach the King directly he risked crossing into Kuwait on January 10, 1930 and begged the Political Agent Harold Dickson to accept his surrender. According to Saudi historian Mohammad al-Mana, Dickson was reluctant to accept the surrender but al-Duwish was adamant.<sup>143</sup> However, Hogarth asserts the opposite; that Dickson had to persuade a reluctant Faisal to surrender to the British in order to spare his family and forces from the men of Ibn Saud.<sup>144</sup>

### Secret Funding of the Ikhwan

Ibn Saud suspected that there was a secret source of funding for the Ikhwan rebellion as al-Duwish always seemed to have plentiful supplies, arms and ammunition, and wondered whether it was possible that al-Duwish's attacks were being funded by another power.<sup>145</sup> Ibn Saud sent an emissary, Muhammad Asad, into Kuwait to investigate the possible sources of al-Duwish's funding. Asad discovered that al-Duwish was

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<sup>140</sup> SOSCO to Resident, Gulf, November 6, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>141</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p.172.

<sup>142</sup> HCI to Resident, Gulf, November 19, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>143</sup> Almana, *Arabia Unified*, p.132.

<sup>144</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p. 175.

<sup>145</sup> Political Resident, Gulf to SOSCO, March 13, 1928, IOR L/P&S/10/1235/P1436.



receiving guns, ammunition and cases of money that were brought in through Kuwaiti ports. But he was unable to ascertain from whom the supplies were actually coming. McLoughlin argues that it was the British that had a hand in supplying arms to al-Duwish—based on some of Asad's observations and Ibn Saud's suspicions.<sup>146</sup>

However, the true financier of the Ikhwan rebellion was more likely King Feisal of Iraq. British officers serving in the Iraqi Government suspected that some third party might be giving support to al-Duwish as a means of getting back at Ibn Saud. In a meeting with the British High Commissioner, Francis Humphrys, Feisal admitted supporting the Ikhwan rebellion.<sup>147</sup> He claimed that it was necessary to cause divisiveness in central Arabia. As long as Ibn Saud was in power he remained a threat to Iraq because "the effective union of fanatical tribes of central Arabia can only be maintained by the policy of constant aggression against neighbouring states." The target of that aggression was, and would continue to be, Iraq. If however, the tribes of central Arabia became disunited and left to their traditional ways "the tribes would expend their energies on local disputes".<sup>148</sup> Thus by encouraging the Ikhwan rebellion Faisal could keep the tribes of Ibn Saud fighting amongst each other and they would cease to be a threat to Iraq.

However, al-Duwish did not rely only on Hashemite largesse and also approached the Sheikh of Kuwait for support, pledging in return to bring his tribe under Kuwaiti authority. al-Duwish knew that the Sheikh might be tempted, because if Ibn Saud was weakened, Kuwait stood a chance of regaining territory lost to Najd at the Uqair conference. Trade restrictions imposed on the use of Kuwaiti ports meant a huge loss in

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<sup>146</sup> Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, p.244, McLoughlin *Ibn Saud*, p.109. McLoughlin argues that al-Duwish was trying to set up an independent state in the north east but his reference is Asad. There was an attempt by Farhan Ibn Mashur of the Ruwalla tribe who sought to use al-Duwish's rebellion as means carve out territory for himself in the north.

<sup>147</sup> Meeting with King Faisal reported in HCI to SOSCO October 6, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

revenue which hurt the Sheikhs income.<sup>149</sup> Although al-Duwish did not receive the blanket support he required he was allowed free passage in and out of the territory. In fact, despite the common assumption that the Ikhwan rebellion was a reaction to their suppression and loss of power, there is also the possibility that al-Duwish had ambitions to create his own independent kingdom using the Ikhwan to fuel his own political ambitions. Howarth remarked that the "urge to kill or convert the unfaithful could never be satisfied" since there were always more unfaithful to be conquered.<sup>150</sup>

### Aftermath of Rebellion

The Ikhwan rebellion was a costly affair for Ibn Saud. Large quantities of supplies (petrol, food, and money) had been spent to raise, feed, arm and compensate an army. Taxes had been levied on both beduin and townsmen leaving many in difficult financial situations. Ibn Saud's expenditure was still greater than his income, and the world-wide effects of the Great Depression included the curtailment of the numbers of pilgrims which now more than ever were needed to bring in revenues.

Attempts to obtain a subsidy from Britain were rejected. Even a request for help to set up a British bank was met with indifference. His Majesty's Government did not get involved in what went on between British banks and foreign governments. Neither the Hijazi or Najdi administrations could get British bank credit. In fact when Ibn Saud wanted to travel from Hijaz to Najd, his administration in Mecca had to negotiate a long term loan with the Soviet Union to obtain enough fuel for the King's entourage of over 100 cars and trucks. The Government of India was owed £30,000 for arms supplied to put down the Ikhwan rebellion.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Political Resident, Gulf to SOSCO, June 13, 1929 and July 17, 1929, IOR R/15/2/92.

<sup>150</sup> Howarth, *The Desert King*, p. 159. See also F.A. Shaker *Modernization of the Developing Nations: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia*, P.h.D. Thesis Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1972, pp.114-152.

<sup>151</sup> In addition the Post Office Department owed the Eastern Telegraph company 2,000 pounds. Political Agent, Jeddah to SSFA, Intelligence Reports for July-August, Oct. 9,



Meanwhile many of the Hijazi officials had not received salaries for months. Merchants suffered under dwindling sales and high import duties and customs fees.

On top of that, the King's finance man, Abdullah Sulayman, would have to demand loans from merchants and other wealthy families in order to meet daily government expenditures. The urban populations were greatly under pressure:

At Medina there was acute distress almost to famine conditions. At Mecca people were beginning to go hungry. In Jedda the populace was in a poor way, while the landlord and merchant classes were exasperated almost beyond measure by the extortions of Abdullah Suleyman. But there was neither leader nor the courage to rebel.<sup>152</sup>

To prevent people escaping to Transjordan the King ordered the Banu Atiyya tribe to police the northern frontier and bolster troops already there. However, the Banu Atiyya faced great hardship themselves and used their position to raid into Transjordan and neighbouring tribes. Garrison commanders could do little to prevent them. Shortages of petrol meant that few vehicles were useable. Moreover, pay was in arrears and there were problems with discipline and low morale among the troops. Fearing mutiny if they ordered an attack on their beduin brethren the local *amirs* could do little but wait until the difficulties passed.

It was disappointing to the King that Britain was not being supportive in his time of need. Britain's ability to fund Ibn Saud was also limited by the economic strain of the Great Depression. London had assumed that pilgrimage revenues were enough to sustain the needs of the regime, as they had Sharif Hussein. However, Britain did not fully consider the higher levels of expenditures as a result of the combined territories of Najd and al-Hasa. Pilgrimage revenue now had to stretch across the

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1931 IOR R/15/2/295. See also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 175-176. Philby described the King "despondent and gloomy" and seriously worried about the financial situation.

<sup>152</sup> Political Agent, Jeddah to SSFA, Intelligence Report for September and October, December 1, 1931, IOR R/15/2/295.

peninsula. Had the British known at the time about the vast mineral resources waiting to be developed beneath the desert, Ibn Saud's financial worries would not have been so great. However, Ibn Saud was in dire need of financial aid and he lamented "if anyone would offer me a million pounds, I would give him all the concessions he wanted".<sup>153</sup>

It would take a small American oil company to discover the secret of eternal wealth and subsequently cause the United States to overshadow Britain as Ibn Saud's closest ally and benefactor.

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<sup>153</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.176.



## Chapter 6

### America Arrives in Arabia

In the period following the First World War the United States had very few political interests in the Middle East. Unlike the European powers, Washington had no special responsibilities in regard to the Mandates, nor did they have an imperial lifeline (such as the Suez Canal) or strategic possessions to protect.<sup>1</sup> The Middle East was considered the traditional domain of European colonial powers and did not rank high on the list of American concerns. Few officials had experience in the region, fewer still had language training in Arabic or knowledge of Arab culture and history. The one department that was interested in the region consisted of a small group of foreign service officers in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) at the State Department.<sup>2</sup>

The NEA was a relatively new creation itself, having only been established in 1909. With a staff of thirteen it had responsibility for overseeing a vast geographical area; from the coast of North Africa stretching across to the Levant, Turkey, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia and India. As such a key factor in deciding a country's importance to the United States was the level of economic activity involving American interests. Much of the geographical areas that came under NEA's supervision had relatively few commercial ties to the United States.<sup>3</sup> Often a single officer

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<sup>1</sup> Kermit Roosevelt, *Arabs, Oil and History: the Story of the Middle East*, New York: Kennikat Press 1949, p. 225 and Aaron Miller, *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy 1939-1949*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, p.22. For more on America's role in the Middle East see Barry Rubin, *The Great Powers in the Middle East: 1941-1947*, London: Frank Cass, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> For the State Department's role in the Middle East see Phillip Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East, 1919-1945*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978, pp.67-72, and John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963, especially pp. 121-127.

<sup>3</sup> There was a modest amount of American commerce with the region but it was mainly concerned with food products like, raisins, figs, and dates and in oriental carpets. See John DeNovo, "The U.S. and the Middle East, 1919-1939" pp. 225-237 and Barry Rubin, "America as Junior Partner: Anglo-American Relations in the Middle East, 1919-1939", pp.238- 251, in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, ed. Uriel Dann, New York: Holmes&Meier, 1988.

would have the task of monitoring developments in over a dozen countries, usually without the help of a secretary or assistant.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1920's there were virtually no American commercial interests operating in the Arabian peninsula.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Government had consular officers there but the nearest was based in Aden to the south. The Division of Near Eastern Affairs observed the politics of the Arabian Peninsula with mild curiosity. Britain, which had been traditionally dominant, was left to deal with the rivalry between Sharif Hussein and Ibn Saud. Outside of the division little was known about the two leaders or their historical conflict but some American officials realised that developments in the Hijaz should be given particular attention. A State Department memo noted:

If we are desirous of following closely events in the Mohammedan world we cannot afford to leave out the Hedjaz. Islam is probably today more virile and fanatic in Arabia than anywhere else, and the developments of the next few years may be decisive in shaping its future elsewhere as well.<sup>6</sup>

It was accepted by the Division of Near Eastern Affairs that the United States was too "entirely dependent" on Britain for information about this area and its leaders. To remedy this a proposal was put forward for the dispatch of a consular officer to Jeddah on a survey mission which would help determine, among other things, whether further diplomatic contact was warranted. However, the financial cost of such a mission and the lack of motivation at senior levels of the State Department meant that nothing

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<sup>4</sup> The State Department, unlike the British Foreign Office, generally referred to the countries of the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula as the Near East. The thirteen staff included clerical workers so the actual number of foreign service officers was far less than that. The countries under the responsibility of the NEA were: Afghanistan, Burma, India, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, all the Gulf states, all of Africa except Algeria and South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Search for Security*, p.22 and Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East*, pp.34-35. From 1927 onwards the American Standard Oil Company sold kerosene and gasoline to merchants in Jeddah. However, it used a middle man for the task and had no company offices or representatives on the ground.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum, Engert to Bliss, November 16, 1922, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Asia:—Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, 1910-1929, Microfilm Record #M722, Reel 17, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as RDOS M722/R17.



came of it.<sup>7</sup> Instead individual Americans who had travelled in the Middle East were consulted to keep abreast of developments in the area.<sup>8</sup>

The State Department would not have to wait long to learn more about Arabia. Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud was himself interested in establishing relations with the United States.<sup>9</sup> After establishing his reign in Hijaz the King found that domestic troubles and parsimonious British assistance created the need for additional friends and generous donors. It was in that respect that on September 29, 1928, Washington received notification that the 'King of the Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies' sought the formal recognition of the United States Government.<sup>10</sup> The King's approach caught the State Department off guard and officials were uncertain as to how to respond. Despite the fact that Ibn Saud had been recognised by Britain there was still uncertainty about the stability of the regime and even the exact borders of the Kingdom. More importantly, the lack of American interests in Najd or Hijaz made it difficult to justify recognition of such a ruler. A Departmental memo of the time reported that:

His (Ibn Saud's) country is of little commercial importance and one in which the United States has few interests; it is improbable that our relations with the Hijaz will increase to a noticeable extent; and it may be argued that recognition would lead to more unpleasant entanglements than real benefits.<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to learn more about the King, the Division of Near Eastern Affairs turned to several private citizens familiar with the region for their

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> This included Ameen Rihani, the Lebanese-American writer, and Dr. Samuel Zwemer, noted American missionary. See Barry Rubin, *Secrets of State: The State Department and the Struggle Over U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> This was a stressful time for Ibn Saud. For most of 1928 he had to deal with disgruntled Ikhwan fighters and handle delicate negotiations with the Iraqis and British over a number of issues including boundary disputes. Sir Gilbert Clayton had been sent by London to help put an end to the problems. The difficulties of the period can be seen in Clayton's report on his mission, IOR L/P&S/10/1237, June 18, 1928 as well as in his *An Arabian Diary* and McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud: Founder of a Kingdom*, pp.88-89.

<sup>10</sup> Acting Foreign Minister, Fuad Hamza to Secretary of State, September 29, 1928, RDOS, M722/R17, US-National Archives.

analysis and views. One of the first to be consulted was Dr. Samuel Zwemer, a Christian missionary with many years experience in the Middle East. Zwemer was very encouraging and supportive of establishing a greater American presence in the Hijaz and Najd. He indicated his own strong personal interest in expanding missionary activity in the Muslim heartland. American missionaries had set up numerous schools and medical missions across the Levant and along the Persian Gulf.<sup>12</sup> Zwemer hoped to establish the first mission school in Jeddah and he believed that: "Through quiet unostentatious work over a period of years, an American missionary organisation as notable as that now existing in Egypt might quite conceivably be built in Arabia."<sup>13</sup>

Aware of the prohibitions on non-Muslims entering the holy cities of Hijaz, Zwemer nevertheless saw little reason why he could not operate in other parts of the peninsula: "I do not think that there is any religious or legal authority for claiming the whole of Hijaz as sacred territory in the sense that a Christian missionary is prevented from carrying on his work as such".<sup>14</sup>

Zwemer, had known colleagues who had travelled around Hijaz without hindrance during the Ottoman and Sharifian reigns and he recalled that there was a representative from the British and Foreign Bible Society in Jeddah during 1914. This interest by an American missionary was seen as sufficient evidence of a significant American interest and the Division was inclined to put forward the case for granting formal recognition of Ibn Saud on that basis.

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<sup>11</sup> *Report on Ibn Saud*, State Department Memorandum, October 25, 1928, Ibid, US-National Archives.

<sup>12</sup> American and British missionaries had also set up several successful medical clinics along the Gulf and did much to popularise modern medical treatment among the Bedouin. Wahba, *Arabian Days*, p. 38. Also activities of American missionaries in the fields of education and philanthropy had been quite pronounced in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. For more on this aspect see Robert Daniel, *American Philanthropy in the Near East 1829-1960*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum from Dr. Samuel Zwemer to the State Department entitled 'Sacredness of Hijaz', enclosed in dispatch from Cairo to Secretary of State, December 17, 1928, RDOS M722/R17.



However, American diplomatic posts in the area advised caution. The legation in Cairo was particularly concerned over the idea of the government supporting missionary goals in the Hijaz. Washington was reminded that the Hijaz was the heartland of Islam and the Government of Hijaz and Najd had a clearly established policy towards missionaries—it would “never permit for any reasons which have to do with the safety of the country, anyone to use the sacred lands of the Hedjaz as a field for the teachings of Christianity”.<sup>15</sup> In the view of the legation, the local authorities in Hijaz were “puritanical and zealous in its beliefs, shunning modern conventions and suppressing anything that was regarded as an innovation”. They had created tensions with other members of the same faith and this was best illustrated by an incident during the pilgrimage season of 1928 involving Egyptian pilgrims.

Traditionally there was quite an active flow of human and commercial traffic between Egypt and the Hijaz. Egypt had a varied and rich Islamic cultural heritage. Among the contributions to the faith was the manufacturing of the black cloth—the *kiswah*, that adorns the Ka'ba in Mecca. A new cloth was sent every year with a caravan of Egyptian pilgrims and was usually accompanied by revellers singing, dancing and playing musical instruments.<sup>16</sup> In that year the caravan procession was set upon by an angry mob of Ikhwan incensed by the spectacle. The attackers attempted to destroy the instruments and beat the singers but were prevented from doing serious damage by the intervention of the King's close advisors and the local community. Nevertheless, many were injured in the scuffle prompting the Egyptian Government to issue a stern complaint to the Hijaz authorities. Much to Cairo's surprise the response was to impose a ban on Egyptians from the pilgrimage ceremonies—while

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Fuad Hamza, Minister, Government of Hijaz to U.S. Legation, Cairo, December 18, 1927, RDOS M722/R17.

<sup>16</sup> Laurence Grafftey-Smith, *Bright Levant*, London: John Murray, 1970, p.177. Grafftey-Smith served as Vice-Consul in Jeddah from 1920-1924 and then again as Minister from 1945-1947. Also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.89-90.

the attackers escaped without punishment. Feeling bitter and bruised the Egyptian Government suspended its relations with the Hijaz and this affair soured Saudi-Egyptian relations considerably.<sup>17</sup>

To Washington the lack of tolerance over religious differences was cause for concern and it reinforced the view that American missionaries would be denied access by the Hijaz authorities. Some in the NEA believed that "the apparent unwillingness of that Government to admit within its jurisdiction American Christian Missionaries" was reason enough for the United States to refrain from according recognition to Ibn Saud.<sup>18</sup> But others in the Division took a broader view and favoured establishing closer relations with a major Arab leader, regardless of the possible prohibitions on missionary activity. They were impressed by the views of Ameen Rihani, the American writer of Lebanese descent who called Ibn Saud "the most powerful unifying force in Arabia since the Prophet Muhammad".<sup>19</sup> Rihani painted a picture of the King as a noble and generous leader who was engaged in a struggle to unify his country. In fact it was Rihani who provided evidence that led some in the Department to believe that Ibn Saud was "not as strict a Wahhabi as he is sometimes pictured".<sup>20</sup>

Rihani reported that, contrary to common belief, modern technology was welcomed by Ibn Saud. Telegraph and telephone equipment were present and use of the motor car was widely visible. In addition, reports from the American Consul in Aden told of Saudi interest in setting up

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<sup>17</sup> F.M. Gunther, Minister, Cairo to Secretary of State, November 9, 1928, RDOS M722/R17. The Ikhwan saw singing and dancing and other rituals of the Egyptian pilgrims as signs of apostasy and felt justified in their attack. In addition, the American legation pointed out that the Egyptian Government had accorded Ibn Saud *de facto* recognition, not *de jure*, which indicated that the King was not fully accepted as ruler of Hijaz by all Arab governments.

<sup>18</sup> Wadsworth, U.S. Legation Cairo to Secretary of State, December 17, 1928, RDOS M722/R17.

<sup>19</sup> State Department Memo: *Report on Ibn Saud*, October 25, 1928, Ibid., Rihani was indicated as a source for this memo. It gives insight into the various opinions held within the Department both for and against recognition of Ibn Saud. See also Rihani's own work on the King, *Ibn Sa'oud*, pp. 130-140.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



radio transmitters with American help and gaining access to other technologies. The Consul dismissed the idea that the King was anything but open to outside assistance: "Ibn Saud, in spite of his severe religious tenets appears to have surprisingly progressive ideas and an eager desire to secure for the Hedjaz the advantages offered by Western civilisation".<sup>21</sup>

Given such a climate, it seemed that opportunities for American businesses certainly did exist and an increase in official American ties could be justified. Moreover, the United States had already recognised the rulers of Albania and Oman, who were less notable than Ibn Saud and with whom America had just as little involvement. It became clear to them that the "factors in favour of recognition outweigh the contrary arguments".<sup>22</sup>

However, before the issue of recognition could be fully resolved, news reached Washington of a fully fledged revolt among the Ikhwan. Details were sketchy and officials were desperate for more information. Consular reports of the time show American diplomats at Aden, Cairo and Jerusalem, engaged in the frustrating task of attempting to gain accurate information on events inside Arabia. Few reliable sources were available, forcing most officials to sift through newspaper articles or conversations with local notables and even seeking out street gossip. The result was that Washington was sent a mass of confusing and contradictory reports, including false claims of Ibn Saud's demise.<sup>23</sup> Though British officials in the region were better informed, no system of co-operation with the Americans was in place. The little information that did get passed on was not very encouraging. The American Consul in Jerusalem learned from his British counterpart that the Ikhwan rebels had the upper hand. Ibn Saud's position was reportedly "extremely precarious" and it was argued that there was

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<sup>21</sup> Aldridge, Vice-Consul, Aden to Secretary of State, January 23, 1928, RDOS M722/R17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Also State Department Memo: *Report on Ibn Saud*.

<sup>23</sup> See cables from U.S. diplomatic posts in Aden, Cairo, and Jerusalem to Secretary of State, October -December 1929 in RDOS M722/R17.

only a "fifty-fifty chance" that the King would be able to subdue the rebellion.<sup>24</sup>

As shown in the previous chapter, Ibn Saud was ultimately successful in quelling the Ikhwan revolt.<sup>25</sup> With that accomplished he turned attention to improving relations with the United States, and especially, gaining formal recognition. Though the King had many admirers in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, pragmatism and caution reigned in the upper echelons of the State Department. The Middle East was still regarded as the domain of Europe and despite the general American antipathy towards colonial powers there was a reluctance to become entangled in the region. As a result Secretary of State, Frank Kellogg, did not believe that formal diplomatic recognition of Saudi Arabia was warranted at that time. However, being sensitive to the possibility of causing offence, the Secretary instructed the American Minister in Egypt not to send the response in an official letter but rather to inform the Saudi authorities verbally. Thus the King's representative in Cairo was invited to the legation where he was informed that the request for American recognition was "one to which the Secretary of State finds it impracticable to reply definitely at the present time".<sup>26</sup>

Despite this set-back Ibn Saud was undeterred. He was well versed in dealing with powers reluctant to support him. His agent in Cairo kept the issue of recognition alive by regularly approaching the American legation to inquire whether American policy had changed. Meanwhile, his admirers in the NEA, particularly the Division chief Wallace Murray, believed that since other nations such as Turkey, Germany and Persia had already extended recognition to Ibn Saud, the United States should move to do the same. The fact that the State Department was considering

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<sup>24</sup> Knabenshue, Consul Jerusalem to Secretary of State, October 24, 1929, RDOS M722/R17.

<sup>25</sup> For further insight into this period see the account of Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, 1980, pp. 222-231. Asad was an Austrian Jew who converted to Islam and travelled widely through Arabia in the 1920's and 1930's.

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of State to Legation Cairo, January 7, 1929, RDOS M722/R17.



granting recognition to Iraq and Yemen at that time also made a compelling case for Saudi Arabia. The Secretary of State agreed but was reluctant to let the NEA handle the negotiations on their own and preferred to have more experienced professionals involved-specifically the British.

The Secretary of State instructed the Ambassador in London to approach the Foreign Office for its counsel. The Secretary was particularly interested to know whether there was any classified information that might have a bearing on the recognition of Ibn Saud's government.<sup>27</sup> Negotiations proceeded amicably with no indications from the Foreign Office that there was any classified information that would preclude the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States.<sup>28</sup>

On May 1, 1931, the United States formally recognised the Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies.<sup>29</sup> Steps were taken to finalise most favoured nation status as well as trade and navigation treaties by which time Ibn Saud had formally unified Hijaz and Najd into one administrative region and changed the name of his realm to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>30</sup>

A variety of factors led to the successful conclusion of this first small step in the history of American-Saudi relations; the input of American travellers to the area, such as Ameen Rihani; Ibn Saud's success in

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<sup>27</sup> Secretary of State to Ambassador, London, February 10, 1931, *FRUS* 1931:II, pp.547-550. The Saudi envoy in London, Hafiz Wahba represented Ibn Saud.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Saud made public statements to reassure Britain that he had no plans for further expansion and was content as a ruler rather than harbouring hopes of being the spiritual leader of the entire Islamic world. Ibn Saud publicly declared after the pilgrimage and Eid celebrations of 1931 that he had no desire to be the Caliph (*Khalifa*) of the Muslim *ummah*. Rather, he sought to be left alone to manage his realm as he saw fit and without critical inspection of the greater Arab and Muslim world. Ibn Saud speech at Khuzam Palace, Jeddah, March 31, 1933, in Intelligence Report, April 1933, IOR R/15/2/295. British officials greeted this with much relief as can be seen in several Departmental memos in PRO FO 371/22004/1714. These include memos from the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office and an article from the journal *Britain and the East* entitled 'Islam Does Not Need Another Caliph'.

<sup>29</sup> Secretary of State to Ambassador, London, May 1, 1931, *FRUS* 1931:II, pp.551-552. The American Minister in Cairo was accredited to the court of Ibn Saud as well.

suppressing the Ikhwan rebellion and his control over the holy cities of Islam; the support of NEA officials, and the move by the State Department to recognise more countries in the Middle East. For Ibn Saud it was an important step in his effort to move beyond the reliance on Britain for financial and political support. For the United States however, extending recognition to Saudi Arabia was of minor consequence. Washington did not establish a diplomatic post in the Kingdom, arguing that it was not financially viable. It was left to an eccentric American businessman named Charles Crane to sow the seeds of future relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

### On the Path to Oil

Charles Crane was the son of a wealthy industrialist and heir to the Crane Bathroom Manufacturing Company. This successful business provided Crane with time and money to indulge his esoteric pursuits.<sup>31</sup> Among his hobbies were the cultivation of dates in California and breeding Arabian horses. Crane's most avid interest however, was in the culture and history of the Middle East. His philanthropic interests included a genuine desire to assist new states in the region to progress. Crane funded a number of agricultural and development projects in Egypt and Yemen and was fond of travelling in the region.

In fact it was during one of many trips to Cairo that he came to the attention of Ibn Saud. Word reached Riyadh of this charismatic American traveller who was seeking to assist local communities with American 'know how'. The King sent an invitation for Crane to come to Jeddah. Intrigued, the American millionaire arrived in the port city on February 25, 1931. A lavish feast was laid out for him. Ibn Saud was typically

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<sup>30</sup> The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially proclaimed on September 23, 1923. See also Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia*, pp.163-164.

<sup>31</sup> Crane had contributed to Woodrow Wildson's Presidential campaign and later served as half of the King-Crane Commission which reported on Syria and Palestine. For background on Crane see Lacey, *The Kingdom*, pp. 225-226, and McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, pp. 121-122.



generous—but especially as this was the first American the King had ever met. In short time Crane had offered the King any assistance he may require. He proposed that a geological survey of the country be mounted to look for mineral deposits.<sup>32</sup> Though Ibn Saud did not believe that there could be much of value beneath the barren desert he was interested in discovering the location of water wells. Crane was eager to oblige and at his own expense commissioned a mining engineer named Karl Twitchell, to survey the country.

Twitchell spent the better part of a year conducting a detailed 1500 mile survey but found only a few signs of underground water wells. However, he was excited to find geological evidence indicating the possible presence of oil deposits in the eastern region of al-Hasa.<sup>33</sup> Officials at the British Legation in Jeddah had observed Twitchell's movements with much scepticism. They had confidently reported to London that "nothing much will result from Mr. Twitchell's investigations".<sup>34</sup>

In fact the Foreign Office was hoping that oil would not be discovered in Saudi Arabia. British petroleum interests in the Middle East, as well as elsewhere in the world, had seen record developments in oil production capacity in the 1920's. Concerns over an oil glut and drop in prices led a consortium of international oil companies to come to an understanding over production quotas, transportation, and the pricing of oil in what was called the 'Red Line Agreement'.<sup>35</sup> Under the conditions of

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<sup>32</sup> Harry Philby, claimed credit for introducing the idea to the King and arranging Crane's visit. Philby had resigned from British service and set up an import business in Jeddah. Subsequently he converted to Islam whereupon he was appointed advisor at the court of Ibn Saud. See Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p. 177 and Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 163. An alternative view is given by Ibn Saud's chief translator and court interpreter, Mohammad Almana who notes that it was Crane himself who persisted in trying to contact the King and that it was through the King's agent in Cairo that the meeting was arranged. See Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, pp. 217-221.

<sup>33</sup> For Twitchell's account of his experiences see Karl Twitchell, *Saudi Arabia*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953, esp. pp.148-150. See also Jane Grutz, *Prelude to Discovery*, in 'Saudi Arabia's Centennial', *ARAMCO WORLD*, Houston: Aramco Services Corp., January-February 1998, pp.30-34.

<sup>34</sup> Foreign Office Minute, April 20, 1932, PRO FO 371/ 16021, E1896/412/25.

<sup>35</sup> David Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 4-6, and Miller, *The*

this agreement, the development of oil inside the boundaries of the old Ottoman empire would be regulated so that better control over the oil market could be maintained. Several British companies were a party to this consortium, which operated under the name of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and the possibility of oil being discovered in Arabia seemed unlikely to their geologists. Twitchell's suspicions, if true, would complicate the IPC's carefully worked out agreements. It was in the interest of the Iraq Petroleum Company to prevent more oil from being brought onto the market, especially by one of its competitors.<sup>36</sup>

However, on the nearby island of Bahrain, exactly one such competitor, the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), did strike oil on May 31, 1932. SOCAL was relatively small American oil company and was not part of the IPC consortium. It did not have large foreign production fields nor did it have an established marketing position in Europe. During the 1920's the company had lost almost \$50 million in unsuccessful foreign oil ventures.<sup>37</sup> The company sought to expand operations, increase profits and become a larger international player. The discovery in Bahrain excited the company but it also made them realise the potential that lay just a few miles across the water on the Saudi mainland. The similar geology of eastern Arabia was indicative of the possible presence of oil.<sup>38</sup>

Standard Oil rapidly sought out contacts with the Saudi government in order to secure an oil concession. Enquiries led them to Harry St. John

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*Search for Security*, pp.12-14. For the British perspective see Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939*, pp.188-219.

<sup>36</sup> Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939*, p.200. A comparison of British and American oil interests can also be found in Rubin, 'America as Junior Partner', pp.238-251. See also Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.178.

<sup>37</sup> Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p.8. Also Grutz, *Prelude to Discovery*, pp.30-34.

<sup>38</sup> Twitchell did ask other oil companies such as Texas Oil, Jersey, Socony-Vacuum, and Gulf if they were interested in Saudi oil but at that time the major players had more oil than they could handle coming from existing concessions and were not interested, Twitchell, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.148-150. For background on the Bahrain oil concession see Yossef Bilovich, 'The Quest for Oil in Bahrain, 1923-1930: A Study in British and American Policy', in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, ed. Uriel Dann, New York: Holmes&Meier, 1988, pp.252-268.



Philby who was in London doing business on behalf of the King. Standard Oil sent company Vice-President, Francis B. Loomis to meet with Philby for talks. The company was seeking an advantage over other possible bidders and looked to Philby to provide them with the best negotiating strategy. The former British official advised that neither the type of contract nor its intricacies would interest the Saudis as much as the amount of money the company was offering up front. Philby suggested that a large cash offer, which would inject life into Ibn Saud's ailing coffers, would be the most likely to gain the winning concession.<sup>39</sup> What Loomis did not know was that the almost any substantial offer would have been entertained. Saudi finances were poor and Philby had been in London to obtain a loan of £500,000 pounds in gold from the Bank of England which had been turned down. The Bank frankly stated that it did not believe such funds could be raised from any source in London.<sup>40</sup>

Though certainly interested in making a bid for the concession, Standard Oil needed to find out more about Saudi Arabia. The company knew little about the nature of the government or how stable it was and it was essential to get more information about the country and its ruler before proceeding further. Loomis turned to the State Department and inquired about the treaties that existed between the United States and Saudi Arabia. He was particularly interested in knowing what protection Washington would provide to company operations if the regime in Saudi Arabia was overthrown. In addition, there was the question of British influence on Ibn Saud-would the company have to gain permission from London prior to making an offer to Ibn Saud?<sup>41</sup>

A prompt reply came from William Murray, of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, to the effect that although recognition had been granted to

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<sup>39</sup> Philby, *Arabian Oil Ventures*, pp.77-78, Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, p.203.

<sup>40</sup> Ryan to Simpson, Report for May-June 1932, July 17, 1932, IOR R/15/2/295.

<sup>41</sup> Loomis to Secretary of State, October 25, 1932, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Saudi Arabia 1930-1944, T1179, Reel 1, US-National Archives. Hereafter cited as T1179/R1, RDOS-SA.

the government of Saudi Arabia, relations between the two countries were still in their infancy. Commercial and navigation treaties had yet to be fully implemented. Moreover, the establishment of diplomatic offices was not being contemplated at that time and future moves in that direction depended on the level of American interests in the country.<sup>42</sup> Murray did however, reassure Loomis that the company could negotiate directly with Ibn Saud and that London did not control the granting of oil concessions in Saudi Arabia. It was recommend however, that SOCAL retain the services of Karl Twitchell, the engineer who had surveyed the area, since Murray believed that it was far better to have an American citizen on the company payroll, than to rely on the uncertain loyalties of Harry Philby.<sup>43</sup>

Driven by the need to expand its overseas sources of production and gain a larger share of the world oil market Standard Oil decided to press ahead with the concessions despite the undeveloped nature of the American-Saudi relationship and the lack of an official U.S. Government presence. It was in this endeavour that in early February 1933, Karl Twitchell arrived in Jeddah accompanied by Mr. Lloyd Hamilton, SOCAL's legal advisor, to begin negotiations with the King.

For his part Ibn Saud was facing a difficult situation—the effects of the Depression of 1929-1930 had hit the country hard, starving it of trade, discouraging pilgrim visitors and crippling revenues. With stipends, subsidies and largesse to dole out, the King needed an infusion of funds to maintain his delicately balanced subvention system. Although he could not rely on the sale of one concession to solve his financial woes, times were desperate. Even the American Consul in Aden knew of the strain:

A succession of poor pilgrimages, culminating in the present disastrous one, seems to have forced Ibn Saud's hand....neither he nor his government could be expected to last much longer without money. He is pandering to

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<sup>42</sup> Murray to F. Loomis, October 27, 1932, T1179/R1, RDOS-SA, US-National Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Following that advice Twitchell was added to the company payroll. Memorandum of Conversation, Murray and Loomis, December 1, 1932, T1179/R1, RDOS-SA, US-National Archives.



foreigners, offering anything upon which his hand may fall, in return for funds.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these conditions, the negotiations between the oil company and Ibn Saud did not proceed without delay. Hamilton, the SOCAL legal representative, was naturally expecting to go formally through the contract discussing each point in detail. But the King's advisors found this tedious. There was also Saudi disappointment when the company offered a small deposit up front and tried to sell the King and his advisors on the idea of waiting for future profits. However, Harry Philby stepped in and urged Hamilton to forego the abstract explanations of contractual language, which the Saudis would not comprehend, and come up with a sizeable deposit up front.<sup>45</sup> It would not be the *type* of contract that was important but the financial incentives it offered. Philby's close relationship with Ibn Saud has been noted earlier and he worked hard in this instance to get the best deal for the King. It is highly likely that after the initial discussions with Hamilton, Philby either on his own initiative, or on instructions from the King, leaked information about the proceedings to the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) in anticipation that a bidding war might start.<sup>46</sup>

In the middle of the Saudi-SOCAL negotiations a representative of IPC, Stephen Longrigg, appeared in Jeddah to place his company's bid for the concessions. The arrival of Longrigg made Hamilton very nervous because SOCAL was no longer the sole company in the running. There was also uncertainty as to what pressures the British controlled IPC might bring to bear on the King. In fact, Hamilton need not have worried about the Iraq Petroleum Company, since its bid for the concession had been a modest £10,000—intended more to hinder SOCAL's entry into the region than

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<sup>44</sup> Consulate Aden to Secretary of State, Washington, April 12, 1933, T1179/R1, RDOS-SA, Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, p.203.

<sup>46</sup> IPC had found out about the American bid through Philby who had hoped to start a bidding war and make commissions for himself in the process, Monroe, *Philby of Arabia*, p.203. See Philby's own account in *Arabian Oil Ventures*, pp. 73-116.

actually acquire the concession for itself.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, fearing that his company would be at a disadvantage, Hamilton quietly hired Philby as his advisor, with a retainer of £1,000 pounds a month to 'guarantee' a favourable outcome.<sup>48</sup>

The proposal that Standard Oil finally offered included a deposit of £50,000 pounds with the first instalment of £35,000, paid in gold sovereigns, due at signing. The remaining portion would be paid eighteen months later. SOCAL would also pay an annual rent of £5,000 pounds until oil was discovered. Thereupon £100,000 pounds would be due within one year of discovery. Royalties were set at 4 shillings per ton. In addition, the Saudi Government was to be provided with 200,000 gallons of gasoline and 100,000 gallons of kerosene annually, free of charge. When news of the American offer reached IPC directors, it was far more than anything they were prepared to offer. On May 5, 1933 the company directors decided to pull out of the running.<sup>49</sup>

Final agreements for the American concession, which was to have a sixty year duration were signed on May 29, 1933.<sup>50</sup> A new corporate entity, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) was created to operate the concession. This marked the establishment of a permanent

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<sup>47</sup> Minister Jeddah (Ryan) to SOSFA, 'Monthly Report-March 1933', IOR R/15/2/295.

<sup>48</sup> That Philby was able to take on conflicting roles was never quite understood by others in the court. When Philby was hired by SOCAL he also took over as translator for the negotiations between the King and the Americans, replacing Mohammad Almana. This allowed Philby to be more intimately involved and filter what other court officials would know of the progress of the negotiations. See Almana, *Arabia Unified*, p.225. Philby does not mention that he was hired as a paid consultant for SOCAL. He innocently claims that he was approached by the oil company "about the possibility of seeking an oil concession from the Saudi Arabian Government", see Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, p.177. IPC's interest in the concession can be seen in the 'Annual Report on Saudi Arabia for 1933', Minister Jeddah, Ryan to SOSFA, PRO FO 371/17941/E3126/3126/25.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, New York: Council for Middle Eastern Affairs Press, 1959, p.299.

<sup>50</sup> 'Concession Agreement Between the Saudi Arab Government and the Arabian American Oil Company, May 29 1933', printed in Annexe 1, *Memorial of American Arabian Oil Company: Documents on the Arbitration Between the Government of Saudi Arabia and ARAMCO*, New York: ARAMCO, 1955. Note:-The Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) became the successor to CASOC on January 31, 1944. See also Roy Leblicher, *ARAMCO and World Oil*, New York: Russel Moore Inc., 1952, pp.23-28.



American presence in Saudi Arabia that would last throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>51</sup>

### The Politics of Oil: 1935-1940

American foreign policy in the inter war period was largely based on the "Open Door" principle which, in its simplest form, meant the equality of commercial opportunity for nationals of all countries in all parts of the world.<sup>52</sup> The United States opposed the negotiation of secret agreements, restrictions and cartels in favour of principles of free trade and open markets. The belief that America had better intentions, and a more noble cause, than the European powers was widely held by many in the State Department. Free trade and the 'open door' were part of a strong anti-colonial creed.<sup>53</sup> Thus the activities of American corporations abroad were seen as promoting the ideals of capitalism and democracy. A successful American bid for concession rights in Saudi Arabia was seen as a victory of free market forces.

Despite the promise of great wealth, the first few years of CASOC oil operations were not very successful. Most of the wells drilled produced just a few thousand barrels before drying up. The company had not found a large, commercially viable field and after four long years of prospecting there were concerns for the future.<sup>54</sup> The King was also anxious. The

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<sup>51</sup> Irvine Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy 1933-1950*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981, p.25. Also Roy Leblicher, et al, *ARAMCO Handbook*, Netherlands: Arabian American Oil Company, 1960, pp. 134-136. IPC could have got the concession had they been seriously interested and offered more money. The King did however give the British company something — on July 9 1936 he signed a concession granting IPC rights for the Western region of Hejaz. See Raymond Mikesell and Chenery Hollis, *Arabian Oil: America's Stake in the Middle East*, Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1949, p.53, and Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 299.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *Aramco, The United States and Saudi Arabia*, p.15. Also see Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

<sup>53</sup> Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East*, pp.3-7.

<sup>54</sup> SOCAL was having better luck in Bahrain where its subsidiary BAPCO was producing substantial amounts of crude. This enticed the Texas Oil Company which had a large international marketing and distribution network to purchase half an interest in BAPCO.

Americans had provided hope but he had little to show from the concession. The £5,000 pounds which the company paid in annual 'rent' was insignificant in comparison to his expenses. Moreover, the political costs of their presence was becoming greater. The sight of American geologists and engineers wandering through their desert domains had upset many tribesmen. The fact that they were accompanied by the King's men and enjoyed royal protection only inflamed matters. Ibn Saud was used to dealing with disgruntled tribesmen but he felt great unease with the American Government when he found that it was taking a position that he very much opposed on the issue of Palestine.<sup>55</sup>

In Washington, particularly in Congress, there was considerable support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>56</sup> Public pronouncements and State Department press releases indicated that the Roosevelt Administration also supported the partition of Palestine.<sup>57</sup> Oil company officials however, worried that the position of the Government would prejudice their relationship with Ibn Saud and could ultimately cost them the concession. The President of SOCAL, James Moffet, articulated the company's concerns to Wallace Murray, at the Division of Near Eastern Affairs. Moffet indicated that a change in attitude of Ibn Saud towards the Americans had been detected and he felt this was the result of the U.S. Government's policy towards Palestine. The conclusion of Moffet and other

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In December 1936, the Texas Co. also purchased a half interest in CASOC in anticipation of future healthy production figures. See Michael Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil, 1941-1947*, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980, p. 36. See also Bilovich, 'The Quest for Oil in Bahrain, 1923-1930' pp.252-268.

<sup>55</sup> For the view of Saudi court officials on Palestine, see Almana, *Arabia Unified*, pp.154-158, 244-246. Ibn Saud's views on Palestine have also been articulated in Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.335-337 ; Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, p.134; Lacey, *The Kingdom*, p.271; McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>56</sup> Tension in the British Mandate of Palestine had spilled over into rebellion during 1936. This topic has already been extensively covered by other authors and is only briefly mentioned here. One extensive source of material is William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 383-569.

<sup>57</sup> State Department press release of October 14, 1938, *FRUS 1938:II*, pp. 953-956. For Roosevelt's views on Palestine see Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Rendezvous with Destiny*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1990, p. 594 and Jim Bishop, *FDR's Last Year: April 1944-April 1945*, London: Hart-Davis, MacGregor, 1974, pp.444-445.



"competent officials" at CASOC was that if the United States Government supported Jewish claims in Palestine it would have "serious repercussions on American oil interests in Saudi Arabia and might even result in their expulsion".<sup>58</sup> It was SOCAL's desire that Washington take the King's attitude seriously and, as a first step, establish a diplomatic post in Saudi Arabia as a sign of America's interest in his country.

Wallace Murray was well aware of Ibn Saud's opinion. The King had not hesitated in urging the United States to resist the attempts of 'outside forces' to influence its foreign policy. In a letter to the White House Ibn Saud claimed that the Arabs were owed the right to self determination in Palestine:

Mr. President the Arabs of Palestine and behind them the rest of the Arabs, or rather the rest of the Islamic world—demand their rights, and they defend their lands against those who intrude upon them and their territories.<sup>59</sup>

Ibn Saud's letter was the first communication from an Arab head of state complaining of American policy on the issue of Palestine. Though many individuals and organisations had come forward, no one of the 'stature' of Ibn Saud had done so. The State Department felt that the President should take this complaint seriously. The King was considered an "outstanding Arab ruler and as the person most qualified to speak on behalf of the Arab people".<sup>60</sup> Roosevelt however, made no special attempt to placate the King. The White House sent a polite reply along with a copy of a State Department communiqué regarding American policy towards Palestine—which Ibn Saud already had, but made no reference to the President's own opinion on the matter.

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<sup>58</sup> Wallace Murray Memorandum, NEA, July 12, 1937, *FRUS* 1937:II pp. 893-894.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Saud to President Roosevelt, November 29, 1938, *FRUS* 1938:II, pp. 994-8. The King's letter to Roosevelt was also reprinted by his Chief Translator, *Almana in Arabia Unified*, Appendix 7, pp.286-292. Raising the voice of protest was nothing new to Ibn Saud. Years of experience in dealing with parsimonious British officials had allowed the king to develop some political savvy. He had to deal with British support for his mortal enemies—the Hashemites and had grown wise in the way of making demands and issuing veiled threats.

Murray could not take any further steps. An internal State Department report concluded that there was not sufficient evidence to indicate a permanent long term American interest in Saudi Arabia and as a result "did not warrant the establishment of any sort of official representation".<sup>61</sup> Though sympathetic to CASOC's concerns the State Department would not establish diplomatic links with a country based on the needs of a single private company. Saudi Arabia was still in a state of political and economic development. There had not been a serious effort by oil experts to determine the size and rate the importance of Saudi oil reserves in the world market. Yet events of March 1938 would mean that Saudi oil was to take on totally new dimension.

In that month, after several unproductive wells had been drilled, in a new field, named Dammam No. 7, CASOC engineers struck oil at a depth of more than 4,000 feet—deeper than had ever been previously drilled.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, engineers were able to locate several other large oil deposits at even greater depths. Suddenly, the promise of great oil wealth was a reality again. Eager to maximise their search area CASOC management successfully lobbied Ibn Saud to expand their original concession by 80,000 square miles. This brought the total concession area to 440,000 sq. miles, giving CASOC the largest exclusive concession in the world and paved the way for greater American Government interest in Saudi Arabian oil.<sup>63</sup>

With new discoveries and an expanded concession the California oil company believed they had enough proof that American interests in Saudi Arabia were indeed long term. The company boasted that the King had granted an American firm the concessions, favouring them over his

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<sup>60</sup> Welles to President Roosevelt, Jan. 9, 1939, *FRUS* 1939: IV, p.695.

<sup>61</sup> In a desire to resolve the issue and respond to oil company urgings the State Department dispatched Leland Morris, the U.S. Consul in Cairo, on a mission to Saudi Arabia to assess American interests there. See Morris' Report, cited in Fish to Secretary of State, June 21, 1939, *FRUS* 1939:IV, pp.826-827.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Hamilton, *Americans and Oil in the Middle East*, Houston:Gulf Publishing, 1962, p.148-149.

<sup>63</sup> Mikesell and Hollis, *Arabian Oil: America's Stake in the Middle East*, pp.53-54, and Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security*, p. 39.



traditional ally—Britain. However, with the expansion came greater concerns over the security of their investment and fears of the interference of other powers. Reports of Axis attempts to gain footholds in Saudi Arabia caused alarm at CASOC headquarters. Japanese and German companies were reportedly offering large fees for smaller oil concessions while the British minister in Jeddah was said to be still fishing for deals on behalf of British companies.<sup>64</sup> Such endeavours were being conducted with the full support of the respective governments and had the assistance of diplomatic missions in Saudi Arabia.

More pressure was put on the State Department to establish diplomatic representation. It was of the "utmost importance to the California Company that a legation be established so that the interests of the Company be safeguarded".<sup>65</sup> It should be noted however, that the Axis threat to the American concessions was exaggerated. Although Axis representatives had visited Saudi Arabia, neither the Japanese nor Germans had diplomatic missions inside the country. Nor was their access to the King or their influence on him as great as CASOC made it seem as the oil company continued to demand that the U.S. Government take formal and concrete steps to raise the American presence in the Kingdom.

By the summer of 1939 the persistence of the oilmen paid off.<sup>66</sup> The State Department agreed to approach President Roosevelt for permission to establish diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. In his memo to FDR, the Secretary of State emphasised the fact that the Germans and the Japanese had already gone to Saudi Arabia to prospect for oil concessions. In an attempt to make the proposal more appealing the Secretary proposed

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<sup>64</sup> The CASOC representative in Saudi Arabia, William Lenahan, was feeding information to the American Minister in Cairo. Lenahan fuelled fears of Axis activities by stating that the German Minister to Iraq, Fritz Grobba had arrived in Saudi Arabia to attempt to gain favourable treatment for Axis companies and obtain valuable concessions. Minister Egypt (Fish) to Secretary of State, June 21, 1939, *FRUS* 1939:IV, p.824.

<sup>65</sup> Minister Cairo, (Fish) to Secretary of State, Washington, June 21, 1939, *FRUS* 1939:IV p. 826.

that the American Minister in Cairo have his accreditation expanded to include Saudi Arabia. This would allow American representation without incurring significant additional expense. President Roosevelt noted his approval of this measure by scribbling "excellent idea—OK FDR" on the Secretary's proposal.<sup>67</sup> As a result, Bert Fish, the residing American Minister in Cairo, became the first American Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary accredited to the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>68</sup>

Even though Ibn Saud probably had little understanding of the complexities of American politics, he obtained greater American involvement by virtue of CASOC's fear of losing their investment. It was a pattern that would repeat itself on numerous occasions. Whether the King accepted SOCAL's bid because of the perception that America had no imperial intentions or because of the sheer size of the American down payment is open to conjecture. But the latter argument seems to be the more favourable. SOCAL officials certainly rated themselves as having better motives than the British and their deposit of gold provided a timely injection of funds precisely when the King was in urgent need of it. The American presence was ensured and it would steadily grow. However, Ibn Saud would always be able to play on American naiveté and inexperience in the Middle East to his advantage.

### Oil Company Pressure Grows: 1940-1943

Two months after Washington appointed Bert Fish as the first American envoy to Saudi Arabia, war broke out in Europe. In the first months of the Second World War, Axis armies made considerable headway advancing

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<sup>66</sup> The American Minister in Cairo and the Minister in Baghdad both strongly endorsed the establishment of relations—no less due to the lobbying of the oil company. See Minister Iraq (Knabenshue), to Secretary of State, June 21 1939, *FRUS* 1939:IV p. 827.

<sup>67</sup> Secretary of State to President Roosevelt June 30, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939:IV p.827-828.

<sup>68</sup> Secretary of State to Minister Egypt, July 12, 1939, *FRUS* 1939:II, p.829. The American Minister to Saudi Arabia officially presented his credentials to Ibn Saud on February 4, 1940.



across Europe through the Balkans, Greece and Yugoslavia. In North Africa the unrelenting success of the Afrika Corps sent British forces retreating into Egypt, in turn placing the security of the Middle East in jeopardy. With communications to her Eastern Empire threatened, Britain saw the need to have as many friendly Arab rulers in power as possible. London decided to reintroduce the subsidy programme to encourage Arab loyalty.<sup>69</sup> In the short term this was great news for Ibn Saud. He found himself almost £400,000 pounds richer in 1940.<sup>70</sup> Though this was still far short of the amount that was required to cover his expenditures. Wartime conditions had severely curtailed his regimes main income earner—the pilgrimage. In 1938 approximately 60,000 worshipers had come to the holy cities. The following year that figure had dropped by half.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the reduction in shipping curtailed imports and led to shortages of foodstuffs. Revenues from taxes, fees and customs duties evaporated. This translated into a substantial drop in earnings for the King and affected the livelihood of many merchants and traders, particularly in Hijaz.

Despite British aid the King found it difficult to maintain his subsidies to the tribal chiefs or to manage burgeoning government expenses. The American legation in Cairo forecast that it “will undoubtedly be a lean year financially for Ibn Saud and it would not be surprising to hear of his casting about for a loan”.<sup>72</sup> In fact Ibn Saud turned to the one source which he could put pressure on—the oil company and the King asked them to advance money against future royalties. He asked for the

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<sup>69</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951*, p.189.

<sup>70</sup> In 1940 Ibn Saud received £396,582 from the British subsidy. This was raised in 1941 to £1,111,375 pounds. By 1942 the figure had more than doubled to £2,945,550 pounds. At the end of 1943 the King had received a total of £8,294,343 pounds. Figures cited in Baxter Minute, March 16, 1944, *Report on Future of Saudi Arabia*, PRO FO 371/40265/E1775/128/25.

<sup>71</sup> Bert Fish, American Legation, Cairo to Secretary of State, Washington, November 11, 1940; reported that in 1938 59,627 pilgrims came but in 1939 only 32,288 arrived with 1940 figures expected to be lower than that. RDOS-SA, T1179/R3, US-National Archives. See also Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security*, pp.41-45.

<sup>72</sup> Fish to Secretary of State, November 11, 1940, RDOS-SA, T1179/R3, US-National Archives.

immediate advancement of \$750,000.<sup>73</sup> Company officials in Dhahran recommended to headquarters that the full amount be provided and also warned to be prepared to advance another \$3 million over the course of the year. However, company directors in California were amazed. CASOC was facing major strains in production and distribution due to the war. Production cut backs due to tanker shortages meant that less oil was available to transport and sell and it did not want to be in the position of supporting the day to day economic needs of the Saudi government.

Senior company officials were determined to resist the pressures put on them to increase payments. Fred A. Davies, President of CASOC and Lloyd Hamilton (the legal advisor who had negotiated the concession in 1933) travelled to Jeddah in January 1941 to try and reason with the King. However, Davies found the King ready to argue his point and demanded an advance on royalties of \$6 million for that year alone. Davies calculated that the company was being asked to supply 60% of the total budget of the country outright.<sup>74</sup> The King reassured the oil men that he was not being overly demanding on them since he intended to obtain the remaining 40% from the British Government.

Nevertheless, \$6 million was almost double of what CASOC had paid in royalty advances the year before, and three times that paid in 1939.<sup>75</sup> Davies and Hamilton were shocked at this massive increase. At the same time they were desperately afraid of refusing the King's request. It seemed extortionate but the two men agreed that they had to work something out. Davies proposed to the King that the company would pay an initial amount of \$3 million (in \$500,000 instalments). Thereafter, the

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<sup>73</sup> Political Agent Bahrain to Resident Gulf, January 4, 1940, FO 371/24588 E 305/205/25 p.131.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Saud estimated his budget to be \$10 Million, testimony of Fred Davies at U.S. Senate Hearings, Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program; *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress (First Session), Part 41. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office 1948, (Hereafter U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*) p.25051.

<sup>75</sup> In 1939 CASOC advanced \$1.7 million above and beyond royalty payments and in 1940 that rose to \$3.5 million, Ibid.



company would endeavour to raise another \$3 million during the course of the year to make up the \$6 million total.<sup>76</sup> This method of payment seemed to satisfy the King. Relieved at having the matter settled the two oil men flew back to California. However, the finance department of CASOC was in no hurry to make payments. While the King anxiously waited for the first instalment of \$500,000, the paperwork at company headquarters kept the funds tied up. After two months had passed Fred Davies received a sharp reminder that Ibn Saud could play games as well.

Davies received an urgent cable from the CASOC representative in Jeddah, William Lenahan, stating that the Saudi Government was demanding an additional \$1.5 million on top of the overdue instalment of \$500,000.<sup>77</sup> The Saudi Government had also ordered 10 million riyals to be minted at HM Treasury in London and to Davies surprise, the British expected CASOC to pay for it. Obviously the American oil company was viewed as a wealthy corporation which had great financial resources at its disposal. London already contributed £400,000 for 1941 and there was "absolutely no hope of any other sums being advanced this year".<sup>78</sup> The company was thus expected to supply any additional funds for the King. When Lenahan tried to object at being forced to pay the bills of the Saudi Government he was informed that HM Treasury had already issued the order for minting and payment would have to be made.

These tactics exasperated Lenahan who cabled this message to Davies at company headquarters in California:

you will realise were we to grant this present request it would be but a matter of a few days before we should be approached for another loan for ordinary running expenses

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<sup>76</sup> Davies to Ohliger, January 7, 1941, CASOC correspondence in U.S. Senate, *Ibid.*, p.25389.

<sup>77</sup> Lenahan to Davies, March 31, 1941, CASOC cable in U.S. Senate, *Ibid.*, p. 25390

<sup>78</sup> British Minister Stanley Jordan cited in Lenahan to Davies, March 31, 1941, CASOC correspondence published in U.S. Senate, *Ibid.*, p. 25390. In actuality the total amount of aid for the whole year 1941 would come to 1.4 million pounds, see Baxter Minute, February 9 1942, FO 371/31451 E607/157/25.

of the Government and that such requests for this purpose would be made throughout the year.<sup>79</sup>

Yet the general inexperience and insecurity of company men in dealing with the King was ultimately to serve to Ibn Saud's advantage. The King had benefited from the uncertainties of Anglo-American policy. By pressing the British for more funds he got the Americans to pay for it. Through pressure on the oil company he received official diplomatic ties with Washington and the possibility of an American Government grant could not have been far from his mind.

It was clear to Davies and Lenahan that CASOC had to come up with a more stable and long-term solution to the problem of Saudi Arabian financing. Lenahan hoped to avoid provoking "another crises in Government-Company relations" but Davies was shocked at the turn of events.<sup>80</sup> First the additional \$1.5 million and then the demand by the British Minister that CASOC pay for the minting of 10 million riyals. In Davies opinion this was "completely out of order".<sup>81</sup> In his own way Lenahan hoped to remedy the situation by suggesting that the King and the company agree on a fixed amount of funds to be provided for the year. After that any further demands would not be tolerated. However, the relationship between the oil company and Ibn Saud, unlike the British Minister, did not afford them the ability to pressure Ibn Saud.

Jordan, had the British Government, Treasury and military forces behind him and despite the fiscally conservative nature of Britain's own policies the King was encouraged to treat the oil company as a bank. Finding itself in a difficult position CASOC felt that it could not refuse the King without jeopardising its investment in the concession. Moreover, the huge sums of aid that the monarch sought could eventually push him into the hands of other powers, even the Axis. It was the judgement of Davies

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<sup>79</sup> Lenahan to Davies, April 1, 1941, CASOC cable printed in U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p. 25391.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Davies to Lenahan, April 2, 1941, CASOC cable published in U.S. Senate, Ibid., p. 25391.



and other senior CASOC officials that the United States government would have to be brought into the situation if the security of their concession was to be maintained and the fiscal solvency of Ibn Saud was ever to be achieved.<sup>82</sup>

### 'Cash for Oil'-Lobbying for Aid to Ibn Saud

Securing the greater involvement of Washington would require backing from senior administration officials. Davies got in touch with fellow oil executive James Moffet, who served on the boards of two of CASOC's affiliates, and was a well known figure in Washington.<sup>83</sup> Moffet was also a close personal friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and it was no surprise that Davies hoped to get support directly from the administration.<sup>84</sup> In a meeting on April 8, 1941, at CASOC's headquarters in San Francisco Moffet was briefed on the situation in Saudi Arabia.<sup>85</sup> He understood the difficulty in dealing with Gulf monarchs but was amazed at the huge sum that was being demanded as an advance. Davies hoped that with the passage of the Lend Lease Act in March, funds could be made available to support the Saudi treasury and avoid further depletion of CASOC resources.<sup>86</sup> Moffet readily agreed and approached the White

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<sup>82</sup> Davies to Ohliger (General Manager of CASOC in Eastern Saudi Arabia) April 2, 1941, in U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p.25392. See also Miller, *Search for Security*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Moffet was on the board of the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) and the California Texas Co. (CALTEX), both of which along with CASOC were subsidiaries of Texas Oil Co. and SOCAL. Many oil industry executives went to work for the Government during and after the war often on loan or for fixed periods of time; See Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> Moffet had worked with Roosevelt during the First World War when the future president was Secretary of the Navy and in charge of oil purchases.

<sup>85</sup> CASOC correspondence, U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, pp. 25393-97. Also Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 303.

<sup>86</sup> The Lend Lease Act was part of a programme formulated by President Roosevelt to allow Britain to receive loans, war materiel and supplies from the United States. Previous legislation (the Neutrality Act of 1937) prohibited the granting of loans to parties engaged in war and required cash payments for all munitions sold. Roosevelt pushed for reform of the Neutrality Act and worked around these restrictions by allowing Britain to borrow from the United States and lease war supplies. For further details on Roosevelt's efforts see Robert Dallek, *Franklin D Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-1945*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 255-261. Also see Warren Kimball, *The Most Unsordid*

House for an appointment to see the President. He obtained one the very next day.<sup>87</sup>

Moffet began his briefing of the President by focusing on the war not oil. He portrayed Saudi Arabia as a friendly nation in need of help. Axis propaganda was looking to foment discontent among the Arab peoples and Ibn Saud was a major Arab leader with strong pro-Ally sympathies: "No other man in the Arab countries, nor among Moslems the world over, commands prestige equal to his".<sup>88</sup> The King's support would be important to maintain sympathy for the Allied cause in the Arab world. While Saudi Arabia was traditionally in the British sphere of influence, America was helping the Saudi people to develop their oil resources through the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) which had 160,000 American shareholders. The CASOC concession encompassed the entire territory of the states of California and Oregon. It was also the only American oil company in the region which had sole rights to what could prove to be one of the largest fields in the world. Yet the continued American character of that concession and the support of Saudi Arabia to the Allied cause depended on the stability of Ibn Saud's regime.

Moffet then gradually introduced the issue of the oil company. Severe financial crises, drought, war and lack of pilgrimage revenue plagued the King and the oil company had been informed that unless the company provided the necessary financial assistance the stability of his

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*Act: Lend Lease, 1939-1941*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969, Chapters 1-3 and Charles Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, pp. 159-172.

<sup>87</sup> According to Miller, *Search for Security*, p. 38 it took a week for a meeting to be arranged. However, after checking records at the National Archives, Washington D.C., this author discovered that Moffet was much swifter and managed to secure an appointment with President Roosevelt the very next day (April 9). This is indicative of the urgency with which the oilmen and Moffet regarded the matter. The meeting was a private and informal one. No substantive records of the conversations during that meeting have been found but Moffet did send his proposal in writing to the President a few days later. Davies had a lot of input in the drafting of the memo.

<sup>88</sup> Moffet to President Roosevelt, April 16, 1941, Records of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Hereafter cited as RONEA), Department of State, Lot File 57D 298 (Box 6), US-National Archives.



regime would be in grave danger. Overall the King required \$10 million a year to meet his expenses. He was expecting the British to provide around \$4 million but sought the remaining \$6 million from the oil company in the form of royalty advances.<sup>89</sup> However, CASOC had already invested large sums in Saudi Arabia. The development of the oil concessions had cost \$27.5 million and since 1939 the company had advanced Ibn Saud \$6.8 million. With new demands for advances the figure could reach \$30 million over the following five years-CASOC felt unable to handle the situation alone. Moffet asserted: "It has now come to a point where it is impossible for the company to continue the growing burden and responsibility of financing an independent country, particularly under present abnormal conditions." <sup>90</sup>

The company was not only uneasy about further cash advances but also felt that despite its assistance to the King the company had negligible impact due, in part, to the strong historical influence of Britain. It would be an important sign of American interest in Saudi Arabia if the United States government was to step in and grant assistance to, the King:

I sincerely trust that some way may be found under existing legislation to provide King Ibn Saud financial assistance, which he so desperately needs in order to maintain his government in a stable condition. We believe that unless this is done, and soon, this independent kingdom, and perhaps with it the entire Arab world, will be thrown into chaos.<sup>91</sup>

Moffet suggested that Ibn Saud's requirements were "moderate" and a "minimum figure for essential expenditures"<sup>92</sup>. He proposed to Roosevelt that if the United States government were to loan Ibn Saud \$6 million annually for the next five years, CASOC could deliver the equivalent amount of petroleum products to the US Government at below the market

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<sup>89</sup> Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi Arabia*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>90</sup> Moffet to President Roosevelt, April 16, 1941, RONEA, Department of State, Lot File 57D 298 (Box 6), US-National Archives. See also *FRUS* 1941:III, p.625.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

rate. In essence it was a cash for oil transaction. The oil company was also hopeful that the deal would give the impression to Ibn Saud that Washington was taking direct interest in Saudi Arabia and that this would bolster CASOC's bargaining power with the King. Moffet also thought that the British should be urged to give more assistance themselves, but should not be allowed to obtain any oil from the concession. In fact Moffet wanted Washington to get a commitment that Britain would not "directly or indirectly" take any action that would threaten the American character of the concession.<sup>93</sup>

The President listened to Moffet's presentation but did not enter into detailed discussions about Saudi oil. He had agreed to the meeting to accommodate an old friend. The issues would be left for others to resolve. The 'cash for oil' proposal was forwarded to the State and Navy Department's for comment. He also had his assistant Harry Hopkins inquire from the Federal Loan Administrator, Jesse Jones, whether a loan to Saudi Arabia could be arranged. Ironically, Hopkins did not believe that Saudi oil revenues would be enough collateral for the loan and he suggested that "instead of using his royalties on oil as collateral we could use his royalties on the tips he will get in future on the pilgrims to Mecca."<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, as Davies waited in the San Francisco offices of CASOC for news on the loan, a cable from the company representative in Saudi Arabia, William Lenahan, brought renewed anxiety. Apparently, Ibn Saud was furious that Davies had asked the U.S. Government to grant financial support to Saudi Arabia. The message from the King was "more angry in tone and terminology than any other communication" CASOC had received thus far. <sup>95</sup> The King rebuked the company for its deception.

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<sup>93</sup> Moffet testimony in U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, pp. 24838-39.

<sup>94</sup> Hopkins to Jones, April 14, 1941, cable re-printed in *Ibid.*, p. 25415.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Saud's letter of rebuke was summarised in Lenahan's cable to Davies, April 19, 1941, CASOC cable re-printed in *Ibid.* p.25393.



Davies had promised him personally that the company itself would provide the \$6 million so why had the American government been approached. Ibn Saud stated that he

could borrow money from the United States Government if he so wished and that if he did so wish he would do so directly and not through the company and that furthermore he would not restrict himself to requesting such an inadequate sum.<sup>96</sup>

If the company needed money to pay what it owed Saudi Arabia then it should borrow from the US government itself and not involve his country. He accused CASOC of breaking its word and its written agreement on financial assistance.

No doubt, Ibn Saud was upset by these events. However, this display of anger may actually have been due to the fear that the company's actions would have undermined his own plans to approach Washington for aid. Ibn Saud was well aware that the oil company would be unable to provide the funds he requested. In fact he said as much to British Minister, Stonehewer-Bird.<sup>97</sup> The King had approached Bird in order to ascertain whether Britain would have any objections to him asking Washington for financial aid. When Bird reported this to the Foreign Office considerable discussion ensued. The report was also circulated to the Treasury for comment. The Treasury official who responded argued that Ibn Saud should be discouraged from approaching the Americans as they were unlikely to grant him any aid. Moreover, the King should be told to manage with whatever resources he had available.<sup>98</sup> Fortunately for Ibn Saud, the Foreign Office disagreed with that view and had no objections to the King contacting Washington.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> British Minister, Jeddah (Stonehewer-Bird) to FO, April 22, 1941, PRO FO 371/27265/E2414/155

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. These were handwritten comments made by Mr. Grant of the Treasury Office on the above report.

Meanwhile CASOC was taking Ibn Saud's anger seriously. The company pressed William Lenahan into the job of smoothing things over. Lenahan first went to Prince Faisal, the King's second son and Foreign Minister in order to make him understand the company position. He reassured the prince that the company had acted in the best interests of his father. CASOC was truly unable to come up with the funds itself and was not allowed under American law to borrow from the Government. With Lenahan's persuasion Faisal eventually endorsed the CASOC plan. As Lenahan hoped, Faisal went to the King and was able to smooth matters over. Soon afterwards Ibn Saud sent his own cable directly to the State Department requesting that a loan be granted to his government.<sup>99</sup>

At the State Department, Wallace Murray, the head of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs responded favourably to the Moffet proposal. He concurred with the analysis that Saudi Arabia's income from its pilgrim traffic and customs revenues "had been effectively dried up". Furthermore, the \$10 million annual budget that Ibn Saud requested appeared "to be reasonable" and since Ibn Saud was "fundamentally anti-Axis" and his "influence is great in the Arab world" Murray believed that the Moffet proposal should be given approval.<sup>100</sup> Others in the State Department, such as Max Thornburg, Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State, were not so sure. Thornburg pointed out that the King might in any case turn to the Axis powers for help: "Certainly he would probably have to do so unless funds were forthcoming".<sup>101</sup>

Though officials at the NEA were optimistic about the political and economic benefits of the loan to Saudi Arabia, reports from the military on the practical utility of Saudi oil were not so favourable. The Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, reported that an analysis by Navy engineers showed Saudi crude had low octane and high sulphur content which fell below the

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<sup>99</sup> Abdul Aziz Al-Saud to Secretary of State, June 26, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, p. 631, fn.23a.

<sup>100</sup> Murray to Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, April 21, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III pp. 627-629.

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Thornburg with Asst. Chief of Division of NEA, *FRUS* 1941:III, pp.629-631.



minimum standards required by Navy vessels and aircraft. Saudi crude was thus unsuitable for Navy use.<sup>102</sup> This was followed by a note from the office of the Federal Loan Administrator, Jesse Jones, which stated that there was no legal justification for allowing federal funds to be made available to the Government of Saudi Arabia.<sup>103</sup> These reports made it difficult for the White House to proceed. President Roosevelt, although interested in following Moffets' proposal, was left with few options. He did not have the means to force its implementation. Moreover, it was still apparent that Saudi Arabia was more in the British sphere and that London would ultimately have to deal with the issue. Roosevelt sent word to his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull to "tell the British I hope that they can take care of the King of Saudi Arabia. This is a little far afield for us".<sup>104</sup>

Instructions were sent to the American Minister in Cairo, Alexander Kirk, that the King should be should be informed that while the highest regard was held for his country it was necessary for the United States Government to concentrate on assisting those nations which were directly involved in the war. It was also understood that Britain had already provided assistance to Saudi Arabia from the considerable amount of aid that the United States had granted HM Government.<sup>105</sup> However, Kirk was unhappy with the state of affairs. It was unwise to leave it to the British to provide aid to the King because "the United States would appear to be

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<sup>102</sup> Secretary of the Navy, Knox to President Roosevelt, May 20, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III pp.635-636. See Anderson, *Aramco, the United States and Saudi Arabia*, p. 31, fn 90.

<sup>103</sup> Federal Loan Administrator, Jones to Secretary of State, Hull, August 6, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III p.643. Among the provisions of eligibility for lend lease was that the recipient nation should be democratic. It would be difficult for the Roosevelt administration to justify aid to a distant desert monarchy given isolationist sentiments in the US Congress were still very high. See also Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War*, pp. 159-172.

<sup>104</sup> Roosevelt Memo to Federal Loan Administrator, Jones, July 18, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, p.643. The British Ambassador to Washington was asked if Britain could make available funds to help out Saudi Arabia from the \$425 million loan that the United States had recently granted His Majesty's Government. See Jones to Hopkins, July 22, 1941, PSF Diplomatic Box, Folder: Saudi Arabia, Roosevelt Papers, cited in Miller, *Search for Security*, p.45.

<sup>105</sup> Minster Egypt (Kirk) to Secretary of State (Hull), August 21, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, pp. 640-643.

resigning to the British all initiative in the Near East generally and in Saudi Arabia in particular."<sup>106</sup> From Washington came a firm reply — 'the matter had been given much thought and the President himself had come to this decision'. Kirk was reprimanded for his naivety and for not considering the possibility that the King may have been exaggerating to involve the United States as a counter weight to Britain and in the process gain greater financial assistance. However, the Secretary of State was confident that Britain, rather than the United States, was more susceptible to this tactic because Saudi Arabia was "of more political and strategic importance to the British Empire than this country".<sup>107</sup>

Others in the State Department, particularly Wallace Murray and his colleagues at NEA, were inclined to agree with Kirk. They were strongly motivated to help Ibn Saud, believing him to be the most important Arab leader of the time. Murray did not like the prospect of disappointing the King and letting him feel 'abandoned' by the United States. Having served in the U.S. Mission in Tehran during the 1920's Murray had a greater experience in the Middle East and had also developed a strong anti-British bias.<sup>108</sup> Undaunted by the White House decision, Murray came up with another proposal to assist the King. It involved the dispatch of an agricultural mission to help in the exploration of Saudi water resources and in the cultivation of crops. This would at least indicate some official interest on the part of Washington.<sup>109</sup> To avoid the lengthy delays that a congressional committee would entail, to authorise funds, it was proposed that the President use his discretionary, Emergency Fund for this purpose. However, this too came to no avail as the proposal remained in the White House for months without action. The Roosevelt administration was still smarting from criticism from the 'isolationist' Congress over its perceived

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<sup>106</sup> Minster Egypt to Secretary of State, August 30, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, pp. 647-648.

<sup>107</sup> Secretary of State to Minister Egypt, September 10, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, pp.648-649.

<sup>108</sup> Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security*, p. 51

<sup>109</sup> Alling Memo (Acting Head of NEA) to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, September 27, 1941, *FRUS* 1941:III, pp. 650-651. At the time that Murray's proposal was finalised, Paul Alling was temporary head of NEA.



activist foreign policy. There was little desire to face more criticism over granting aid to a neutral country which played no direct part in the war effort.

Then on December 7, 1941 aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy launched a surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. America was propelled into the Second World War. Within days the climate in Washington had changed. Murray realised that there was a new opportunity to bring up the case of Saudi Arabia. Couching his proposal in light of the war effort, Murray reintroduced his recommendation for an agricultural mission. This time however, with the added purpose of providing cover for War Department logistics officers who wished to locate possible sites for military facilities in Saudi Arabia since "It is entirely possible that as a result of military deployments in the Middle East it will be necessary for our armed services to obtain sooner, or later rather extensive facilities from the King of Saudi Arabia".<sup>110</sup>

This reformulated request was taken up remarkably quickly and approval from the White House arrived within days.<sup>111</sup> There seemed to be no obstacles in the President's way to authorise assistance in this case. For Murray and his colleagues at the NEA it was a small victory but the incident served to prove the reluctance with which the Administration became involved in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom's rich mineral resources were yet to be seen as a strategic asset vital to the national security of the United States.

However, in Riyadh the news of the American agricultural mission was not greeted with much enthusiasm. Ibn Saud had placed many requests for American aid and had hoped for concrete assistance. Instead he was being sent more advisors, whom he would have to feed and protect.

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<sup>110</sup> Murray's proposal was forwarded to the President by Under Secretary of State, Sumner Welles. See Under Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, February 12, 1942, *FRUS* 1942:IV, pp.562-563.

<sup>111</sup> Under Secretary of State, Welles to Minister Egypt, Kirk, February 26, 1942, *FRUS* 1942:IV, p.564.

Meanwhile the Americans and the British did manage to put together an additional £1 million which made an impression on the King.<sup>112</sup> It was far more substantial than the agricultural mission that the Americans offered, though it was only a fraction of the £10 million that Ibn Saud actually hoped for. It seemed inevitable that he would have to resume his pressure on the oil company to supply his financial needs.

In January 1942, CASOC was asked for \$500,000 to pay for motor cars that the Saudi Government had ordered and for buying sovereigns in India. CASOC did not have access to dollars.<sup>113</sup> CASOC wanted Britain to allow the King to have access to rupees as this would alleviate the Saudi need for dollars. Britain agreed to increase the subsidy by a large margin from £250,000 to £3,000,000 pounds. However the Foreign Office did not want Ibn Saud to know that they had agreed to go so high out of fear that Britain would be asked for the whole sum up front. Therefore, the Consul in Jeddah was instructed only to say that Britain would be providing a further £250,000 (making total 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 1942 contributions to £750,000) and would consider the question of further assistance afterwards.<sup>114</sup> With such large financial contributions being made the Foreign Office was also considering establishing a state bank "which might assure some measure over the Saudi Arabian finances".<sup>115</sup>

However, Ibn Saud's financial situation was desperate. He needed to know the total amount of aid coming from Britain so that he could plan ahead and he put pressure on the British Legation. In an urgent memo on February 11, 1942 the British Minister in Jeddah reported that the Saudi Government had asked for at least 200,000 gold sovereigns within two

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<sup>112</sup> The oil company knew that the British had sent the £1 million in June 1941 and it made them more anxious to get Washington to provide aid. Davies worried that the King would not realise that it was through constant pressure from the oil company and the State Department that Britain sent more aid. See Davies to Ohliger (al-Khobar Office) June 9, 1941, CASOC correspondence submitted to the U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p.25422.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Embassy London to Foreign Office January 25, 1942 FO 371/31451/E570/157/25

<sup>114</sup> Foreign Office to Consul Jeddah, February 6 1942, FO 371/31451/E607/157/25



weeks. The Saudi treasury had no riyals and no gold with which to buy them. The Consul agreed that the situation was urgent but in his cable to London reported that he thought 100,000 sovereigns would suffice.<sup>116</sup> The urgency of the situation arose out of the fact that despite assistance from Britain it came in the form of bank deposits not in coinage. So there was no coins to pay salaries and tribal subsidies. Thus it was difficult to circulate money into the economy. Also the subsidy in sterling did not allow the purchase of goods from outside the sterling area, i.e. from the United States.<sup>117</sup>

While Ibn Saud attempted to maintain the stability of his domestic environment CASOC was becoming increasingly concerned about the physical security of its concession. The company manager in Arabia, Floyd Ohliger was worried about the repercussions of an airborne attack on oil installations in Dhahran and Ras Tanura and wanted to ensure the ability of oil to reach refineries. The company had plugged with cement those wells that were not essential to maintain daily production needs. The remaining wells were equipped with 'velocity chokes'. These were valves that would prevent serious damage to the well if the surface equipment was bombed. Concrete walls and sand bags had been placed around other equipment at the oil facilities. However, there was still no protection from air attacks. CASOC's own security assessment pointed out that the whole installation could be wiped out with a single bombing run:

The oil and gas separating and collecting facilities in Dhahran are the most vulnerable as well as the most essential part of

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<sup>115</sup> Foreign Office (Baxter Memo) to HM Treasury, February 5 1942, FO 371/31451/E739/157/25

<sup>116</sup> Legation Jeddah (Bird) to Foreign Office February 11 1942, FO 371/31451/E981/157/25

<sup>117</sup> Foreign Office officials were also frustrated that Ibn Saud refused to accept the paper currency without silver to back it up. He would not go against religious principles which required paper money to have actual coinage to back it up. Foreign Office to Jeddah, March 9 1942, FO 371/31451/E1393/157/25. Despite all the difficulties of 1942 Ibn Saud also managed to find the finances to appoint the first Saudi consul to Jerusalem. This period also saw the removal of the Italian legation from Jeddah, the consul was a man that annoyed Ibn Saud and he refused the replacement that Rome provided, choosing instead to ask them to leave. Legation, Jeddah to Foreign Office Annual Report for 1941, July 22, 1942, FO 371/31460 E4326/4326/25.

the whole producing and shipping system. If these facilities were destroyed, the entire Arabian production would be lost to the war effort until such time as the equipment could be replaced. The specialized nature of this equipment makes it unlikely that it could be replaced in much less than eight months and thus no crude oil could be shipped or utilized in the interim. This particular system which is the heart of all our producing operations, could be destroyed with about three fairly well placed medium sized bombs.<sup>118</sup>

CASOC approached the US military for the installation of anti-aircraft guns for its facilities. The company felt that it was "essential" that the guns be provided, claiming that despite the precautions taken, the facilities were still vulnerable to air attack which could shut down the entire Saudi operation. More importantly the company wanted Americans to man the guns because the "American is the most popular foreigner in Saudi Arabia, and it is a certainty that he will get more cooperation from the local population than anyone else."<sup>119</sup>

Ohliger emphasised that what was needed was anti-aircraft guns, not ground troops. The company wanted to avoid a situation where the Saudi Arabian Government might step in to supply ground troops as a solution. The last thing the company wanted was Saudi soldiers involved in their operations. "The subject therefore must be presented to the Saudi Arabian Government in a manner that they will not volunteer or insist on moving in several hundred Arab soldiers".<sup>120</sup> The request of CASOC was sent to the Joint Planning Staff Committee (JPC) of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Unfamiliar with the region, the JPC requested the input of their counterparts on the British Joint Staff and whether Britain might supply the necessary defences.

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<sup>118</sup> Report of Floyd Ohliger, CASOC, to US Joint Chiefs of Staff, no date, enclosure in Memorandum, Admiral King, Chief of U.S. Naval Operations and General Marshall Chief of Staff, U.S. Army to British Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 13, 1942. RG 218 190/1/11/6, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, Geographic file 1942-1945, #383.21, Box 3, Folder: 'Arabia', USNA.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.



The British replied that they did not have the resources to provide specific anti-aircraft support to the defence of Saudi oil installations other than the general air defence plans for the region. The British Joint Chiefs 'welcomed' an American anti-aircraft detachment since the Saudis had expressed willingness to allow the guns to be installed and manned by Americans, provided they trained Saudis in using them as well.<sup>121</sup> Despite British reluctance, it was the view of the Joint Planning Staff Committee that Saudi oil installations were in an area of British strategic responsibility and therefore the British should supply anti-aircraft protection. If the United States were to do so it would disperse the strength of its units elsewhere. In any case the JPC felt it unlikely that an air attack from Axis forces would occur. Thus the Committee decided against sending anti-aircraft guns or personnel to Saudi Arabia.<sup>122</sup>

In Washington the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia was yet to be realised, the Arabian Peninsula was seen as far from the battlefield and there was little concern of an overt physical threat to oilfields there. This was of no comfort to CASOC which was extremely anxious over the slightest possibility of a threat to their prize concession. Yet it would not be long before Washington and its military planners would also come to view the Saudi fields with hawk like interest.

#### The British Threat and Lend Lease Aid for Ibn Saud

Prior to America's entry into the war, there was little interest in foreign oil reserves. American domestic production accounted for 63 per cent of the world's crude oil output. In contrast Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf

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<sup>121</sup> Brigadier General Dykes, British Joint Staff Mission, Washington to General Deane, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 13, 1942. Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, Geographic file 1942-1945, #383.21, Box #3, Folder: 'Arabia', USNA

<sup>122</sup> Notes of 42<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of U.S. Joint Planning Staff (JPS), October 21, 1942, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, Geographic file 1942-1945, #383.21, Box #3, Folder: 'Arabia', USNA

combined produced only 5 per cent.<sup>123</sup> Once the United States entered the war however, it became clear that demand for oil and petroleum products would be enormous. Washington could not expect to be able to fulfil domestic fuel needs and those of the Allied war effort as well. The government's Petroleum Coordinator estimated that American reserves could be depleted in a matter of a few years, making it necessary to significantly increase the discoveries of new oil deposits.<sup>124</sup> Exacerbating matters was the fact that since 1939 discoveries of new American fields had been declining in relation to consumption. This threatened to leave the United States vulnerable to oil shortages.<sup>125</sup> It was in these circumstances that foreign oil deposits, especially those located near theatres of operations, were considered important assets to develop and protect from falling into Axis hands.<sup>126</sup>

The potential shortage of oil supplies was clearly of concern to the State Department's own Petroleum Advisor—Max Thornburg. Having served as a Vice President of the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) before joining government service, Thornburg was well informed about Middle East oil.<sup>127</sup> He was a strong supporter of American oil companies abroad and greatly concerned that foreign oil corporations, backed by their respective governments, had an unfair advantage over American firms. These concerns stretched to include America's ally, Britain, which already

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<sup>123</sup> Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 9. Also Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*, New York: Simon&Schuster 1991, p. 393.

<sup>124</sup> This was the assessment of the Office of the Petroleum Coordinator (OPC). President Roosevelt had created the Office of the Petroleum Coordinator (OPC) to analyse U.S. military and civilian petroleum needs and make recommendations that would ensure uninterrupted and secure oil supplies were available to the United States at all times. The Deputy Director of the OPC was Ralph Davies (no relation to Fred Davies), a senior Vice President of the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL). He recruited much of the OPC staff from oil company personnel. See Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> William B. Heroy, Director of Reserves, Office of the Petroleum Coordinator cited in report entitled *The Importance to the United States of Foreign Oil Reserves in General and of Saudi Arabian Reserves in Particular*, December 29, 1942, RDOS, RG 59, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division, Box 6.

<sup>126</sup> Transportation of Allied oil supplies was fraught with difficulty as in the early stages of the war many oil tankers were lost in German U-Boat attacks. By May 1942 gasoline was rationed in the United States. Miller, *Search for Security*, pp.56-57.



had considerable political influence in Saudi Arabia. Thornburg believed that Britain would seek to maintain a dominant position even after the war.<sup>128</sup> He recommended to the Secretary of State that more active measures be taken to secure foreign oil deposits for U.S. strategic interests. In the case of Saudi Arabia, past financial and political support to Ibn Saud gave Britain the upper hand and could hinder the advancement of American interests:

The financial assistance received from the British has introduced a British influence in Saudi Arabia that did not previously exist. There is no assurance from the study of British policy in the past that this influence may not ultimately be used to the detriment of the vital American interests in Saudi Arabia.<sup>129</sup>

Sharing Thornburg's concerns were officials in the NEA Division. They felt that it was vital to establish a clear policy towards Saudi Arabia to prevent British influence from harming American interests in the Kingdom.<sup>130</sup> Although it was recognised that the King had shown "unswerving loyalty to the British" he had "been careful not to permit any substantial British economic foothold in his country".<sup>131</sup> The fact that an American company had been allowed to acquire an oil concession was seen as an indication that the King did not want to be wholly dependent on Britain. He had turned to the United States to help develop the resources of his country. This meant that there was still an opportunity for the United States to benefit from the foothold established by CASOC. To leave the King to

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<sup>127</sup> Anderson, *ARAMCO, the United States and Saudi Arabia*, p.32.

<sup>128</sup> Memorandum Thornburg to Herbert Feis, State Department Economic Advisor, May 26, 1943, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division, Box 6, USNA. Also Thornburg to Welles, January 12, 1943, cited Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> Max Thornburg cited in State Department report, *The Importance to the United States of Foreign Oil Reserves in General and of Saudi Arabian Reserves in Particular*, December 29, 1942, RG 59, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division, Box 6, US-National Archives.

<sup>130</sup> This is indicated by departmental memos in RDOS-Saudi Arabia, 1930-1944, T1179, USNA.

<sup>131</sup> Memo *Principle Factors Relating to Saudi Arabia*, November 25, 1941, RDOS/T1179/R3. This memo was the culmination of reports from several NEA officials.

survive on the rations of British aid would not bode well for American interests and would place Ibn Saud more firmly under London's control: "If the British, alone and by themselves, get Ibn Saud through his difficulties they may seek a future recompense at the expense of American interests in that country".<sup>132</sup>

Oil company executives were also becoming more concerned over Britain's growing influence in the Kingdom. With the Allied war effort fully underway Britain could move to dominate both the Saudi political and economic system. Company executives were particularly concerned over British plans to establish a currency-issuing bank in Jeddah, which would be run from London by the Currency Control Board. This would increase the leverage Britain had on the financial affairs of the Kingdom and pull the Saudi economy into the 'Sterling block'.<sup>133</sup> Oil company payments and financial transactions within the Kingdom would then have to be conducted in British currency, draining the company's dollar reserves.<sup>134</sup> In a memo to the Secretary of Interior, the President of Texas Oil, William Rodgers stated: "Concern is felt over the rapidly increasing British economic influence in Saudi Arabia because of the bearing it may

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Oil company representatives frequently employed the British threat in discussions with senior officials but it is unclear whether the oil men actually believed in it. Correspondence and reports submitted to a U.S. Senate committee indicate that oil company officials did not fear the physical threat of a British take over of their concessions. See CASOC correspondence of Rodgers, Collier and Moffet, submitted to the U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, especially correspondence of January-February 1943, pp. 25350-25386, and p. 24807.

<sup>134</sup> If Saudi Arabia converted to Sterling currency it would cause the oil company severe financial complications since company revenues would be received in British pounds. Wartime restrictions on currency conversion would restrict their ability to convert pounds into dollars. This would hamper the company's ability to pay its dollar obligations (debts) and ultimately affect profitability. See Rodgers testimony to U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, pp. 24828-24833. Benjamin Shwadran argues that the oil company was "gravely concerned" over its future and the security of the concession. He cites company correspondence as evidence that the oil men were afraid that their concession was going to be revoked and taken over. This author having looked at the correspondence cited by Shwadran would argue that the oil men were concerned more about the ramifications of Saudi Arabia becoming a Sterling currency state and did not fear so much the actual loss of their concession. See Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 308, and U.S. Senate, *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, pp. 25417-25435.



have on the continuation of purely American enterprise there after the war."<sup>135</sup>

Meanwhile reports were coming from the American Minister in Cairo, Alexander Kirk, that Britain was taking all the credit for providing Ibn Saud with financial support—which in fact came from American Lend Lease aid to HM Government:

after watching operation of system by which American assistance is channelized through the British, I have gained impression that we have hereby lost considerable prestige in the eyes of Saudi Arabians who have been increasingly to feel that the British were their only friends in need. <sup>136</sup>

As a result of Thornburg's recommendations, the NEA and Kirk recommended to the Secretary of State that Lend Lease aid be made available directly to Saudi Arabia. With Cordell Hull on one of his many trips to England, Dean Acheson was in the post of Acting Secretary. He found the reports from Kirk and Thornburg compelling and was inclined to agree with their conclusions. Acheson dispatched a memo to the Lend Lease Administrator, Edward Stettinius requesting that Saudi Arabia be made eligible for aid. The language of the request was similar to that used over a year earlier by CASOC president James Moffet; the Saudi Government was described as pro-Ally and Ibn Saud's "unswerving sympathy for and loyalty to the United Nations' cause" was of "inestimable value".<sup>137</sup> Moreover the granting of aid was necessary to "facilitate the prosecution of the war".

While anxious to comply with the request, Stettinius could not do so without Presidential authorisation. The request was forwarded to the

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<sup>135</sup> Rodgers memo, February 8, 1943 text printed in U.S. Senate, *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p. 25386.

<sup>136</sup> Kirk to Secretary of State, January 18, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp.856-857.

<sup>137</sup> Acheson to Lend-Lease Administrator, Stettinius, January 9, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp. 854-855. Acheson also would have realised that Saudi Arabia was the only major political entity in the area that was not eligible for Lend Lease. Turkey had been made eligible on November 7, 1941, Egypt on November 11, 1941, Iraq on May 11, 1941, Iran on March 10, 1942.

White House on January 11, 1943.<sup>138</sup> There the matter was lost in the maze of more pressing issues facing the chief executive.<sup>139</sup> President Roosevelt was an enigmatic, sometimes ambiguous, and contradictory leader and delays in the Roosevelt White House were common. His leadership style has been the subject of debate among presidential historians but his manipulative personality has been well-established. Roosevelt was a careful and calculating politician, maintaining control by concentrating decision making in the White House. He ran domestic policy and dictated foreign affairs over the heads of his cabinet secretaries and often pitted subordinates against each other. He would solicit the opinion of one only to have the response ridiculed. One biographer of the President noted that: "he could be devious, manipulative and at times even dishonest with the Congress and the country."<sup>140</sup> Roosevelt did not like to delegate authority nor did he like to make judgements in a hurry. He was reported to have "elevated procrastination to an art form". While the hopes of CASOC had been raised by the possibility of Presidential interest in Saudi oil, their proposal languished in the White House awaiting an executive decision.<sup>141</sup>

The lack of progress in Washington only made oil company executives more determined and more active. It became clear that Congressional support would have to be enlisted and pressure applied on government agencies in order to push matters forward. William Rodgers, president of Texas Oil Co. and H.D. Collier, president of SOCAL, both parent companies of CASOC, were pressed into this mission. They left the comfort of their San Francisco corporate headquarters to lobby Congress and other senior administration officials in the Capital. One of their first meetings was with Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior and the

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<sup>138</sup> Stettinius to Acheson, January, 12 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, p. 855.

<sup>139</sup> For a more in depth profile of Roosevelt see Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp.255-261. Also Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p.7. Also John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940-1957*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, p. 15 and Rubin, *Secrets of State*, p. 41.

<sup>140</sup> Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 548.



Petroleum Administrator for War (PAW). Ickes was in charge of U.S. government oil procurement and was responsible for promoting government cooperation with the oil industry. Collier and Rodgers raised their concerns with Ickes over the British threat to the "biggest and richest oil reserves in the world".<sup>142</sup> They warned that British companies, with the support of London, would "edge in on their concession" unless Washington provided assistance to the Government of Saudi Arabia and did so quickly.

Ickes was urged to support a proposal for Lend Lease aid to be extended to Saudi Arabia, thus forestalling any chance that their prized oil concession be "cancelled and given over to the British".<sup>143</sup> Despite the fact that it was his role to increase American oil production, Ickes listened with interest but was non-committal. He had years of antagonistic relations with the oil industry and was not enthusiastic about helping a private oil company out of its problems. However, he certainly was willing to further the involvement of his department and secure vital resources for the war effort.<sup>144</sup>

In fact Ickes was extremely interested in Saudi oil and assigned his deputy, Ralph Davies, to look further into the concession. Davies represented Ickes on the powerful inter-departmental board, the Committee on International Petroleum Policy (CIPP).<sup>145</sup> Comprising of

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<sup>141</sup> Kimball, *The Juggler*, p. 98.

<sup>142</sup> Report of meeting between Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes, William Rodgers and H. D. Collier, February 7, 1943, in *Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Secretary of the Interior File, Harold Ickes Papers, Manuscript Division, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., pp.7425-7426. See also testimony of Ickes before U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p. 25232.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ickes had made two unsuccessful attempts to nationalise the oil industry, first in 1935 then again in 1940. There were also moves by Ickes and the White House to restrict the production of oil in order to stabilise the industry. As a result most oil executives distrusted him and the Roosevelt administration. See Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 181-182

<sup>145</sup> Ironically, Davies was himself an ex-oil man who had left a post as vice-president of Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) to join government service when the war began. See Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p.308. The CIPP consisted of

officials from the State, War and Interior Departments, CIPP was responsible for developing long term oil policy. Davies learned that Rodgers and Collier were seriously pursuing the matter with as many Government officials as would listen and that they were desperate for assistance. In fact the oilmen had also arranged to give a presentation to CIPP itself. Following the meeting with the oil men Davies noted that the majority of committee members were in favour of protecting access to Saudi concessions and providing the King with American aid.

After various discussions CIPP proposed that in return for granting aid to the King, the United States should hold the Saudi oil fields as a reserve petroleum stockpile in the ground. Furthermore, the Committee recommended that the United States Government take ownership of the California Arabian Oil Company (CASOC) in order to ensure that Saudi oil was made available for the strategic use of the United States. The CIPP suggested that the US Government make an outright stock purchase which would make the protection and development of Saudi oil concessions a matter of U.S. national security.<sup>146</sup>

Ralph Davies gave his enthusiastic backing to this proposal. It was highly likely that administrative control of the project would be given to his boss, the Petroleum Administrator for War, Harold Ickes. Indeed his hand could be seen in the CIPPS' pursuit of this strategy. Ickes was a long time opponent of the oil industry and their resistance to Government regulation. He had made his reputation taking on industry leaders and members of Congress who were opposed to his attempts to fix prices and set oil production quotas. Moreover, Ickes sincerely believed that it was his duty as a patriot to protect the nation from the "unfair practices" of the

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representatives of State, War and Interior Departments, see Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>146</sup>This proposal was originally made by William Bullitt, the Under-Secretary of the Navy. The details of this proposal were described to Ickes by his deputy Ralph Davies. See entry for Sunday, February 14, 1943, *Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Secretary of the Interior File, Harold Ickes Papers, Manuscript Division, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, DC, p.7448.



corporate sector.<sup>147</sup> The prospect of increasing American oil reserves at the expense of a private company was very appealing. Ickes saw the take over of the CASOC oil concessions in Saudi Arabia as an opportunity for both himself and his department to take a leading role in securing vital American interests. It was with this in mind that Ickes became motivated to obtain financial aid for Ibn Saud. By ensuring the stability of the King's regime Ickes hoped that the oil concessions could safely remain in American hands.

In order to gain executive support for the plan Ickes arranged to meet President Roosevelt in the White House on February 16, 1943. During the course of their conversation Ickes brought up the issue of oil. He lamented the lack of a coherent policy that would adequately guarantee petroleum supplies for U.S. forces. He pointed out that American companies in Saudi Arabia had "probably the greatest and richest oil field in all the world" and yet Washington was providing no help to the Saudi government. America needed to ensure the stability of the current regime and maintain its access to such a valuable commodity. In contrast, Great Britain had provided more than \$20 million in aid to the Saudi King and they were known to never overlook any opportunity "to get in where there was oil".<sup>148</sup> Ickes informed the President that he believed Britain was undermining the CASOC concession and would continue to do so unless Washington stepped in to help Ibn Saud.

The President had already received recommendations from the State Department and a request for authorisation from the Lend-Lease Administrator regarding Saudi aid. However, it took the aggressive

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<sup>147</sup>*Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, Secretary of the Interior File, Harold Ickes Papers, MSS (Manuscript Division), U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Ickes' disdain for the oil industry is articulated in his diary. See also Ickes remarks cited in Stoff, *Oil, War and American Security: 1941-1947*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>148</sup> *Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, pp. 7462-7463. MSS, U.S. Library of Congress.

lobbying of Ickes to push the President to act.<sup>149</sup> Within forty-eight hours of his meeting with Ickes, Roosevelt issued Executive Order #8926, declaring that "the defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States". This made Ibn Saud eligible to receive funds from the Lend Lease budget.<sup>150</sup> It had only been eighteen months earlier that the same President had brushed off the King as being 'too far afield' to warrant American assistance.

Although the issue of financial aid had concluded there was still concern over the vulnerability of the American concession and the long term effects of British domination in Saudi Arabia. The Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) was convinced that British policies in the Middle East would make a "muddle of the area".<sup>151</sup> British and French colonial administration had created a "jigsaw pattern of Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan" fostering numerous political and social problems.<sup>152</sup> It was feared that similar policies could be implemented in Saudi Arabia—with artificial divisions carving up the country among various factions. This was thought to be even more likely in the event of Ibn Saud's death. Britain could intervene in the succession process and impose a Government that might be inimical to American interests. For as long as "Ibn Saud lives the American concession probably is secure".<sup>153</sup> After his death however, there were no guarantees about what path his successor might take.

Saudi Arabia was gradually being recognised as important to American strategic interests and with increasing concerns about British interference Washington's fears would gradually outstrip even those of the

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<sup>149</sup> Before approving aid President Roosevelt wanted to check first to see if Britain had any objections. See Ickes meeting with President Roosevelt, February 16, 1943, U.S. Senate Hearings: *Petroleum Arrangements with Saudi Arabia*, p.25233.

<sup>150</sup> Roosevelt to Lend-Lease Administrator, February 18, 1943, FRUS 1943:IV, p.859.

<sup>151</sup> Memorandum on *Principle Factors in the American Position in the Middle East*, May 26, 1943, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division 1943-1949, Box 6, US-National Archives. This memo reflected the majority viewpoint of the NEA.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



oilmen.<sup>154</sup> Indeed after expending much effort to gain Washington's support for Saudi Arabia the oil men would be unprepared for the overwhelming interest that would soon develop.

#### Petroleum Reserves Corporation: Washington Enters the Oil Business

By the middle of 1943 interest in Saudi oil had broadened to include the logistics and supply officers in the War and Navy Departments. Estimates from military planners had indicated that it would not be possible to satisfy both civilian and military requirements of crude oil from domestic American production alone. Increased demands for petroleum products were also anticipated for naval and air operations in the Pacific and new offensives in Europe. Military representatives to the Committee on International Petroleum Policy were anxious to follow through on the earlier proposal to take over the CASOC concession. Subsequently the Committee made a formal request for the establishment of a Petroleum Reserves Corporation (PRC) which would have the task of securing a controlling interest of CASOC, as well as options on other foreign oil concessions.<sup>155</sup> This was followed by a direct request by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Leahy, to the President recommending the creation of the PRC and the "immediate acquisition of a controlling interest by the U.S. Government in Saudi Arabian oil concessions".<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Sensitivities about British dominance in Saudi Arabia were inflamed when it was discovered that Ibn Saud had used the British Minister in Jeddah to obtain supplies of American arms from the Lend Lease programme — effectively giving Britain credit for material provided by the United States. The Secretary of State, protested to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Leahy. The Admiral was able to deal with the issue much quicker than the State Department because the British Joint Staff had set up a liaison office in the War Department to facilitate Allied military cooperation. In contrast the State Department would have to wait until the British Ambassador received instructions from the Foreign Office before issues could be resolved. Secretary of State to Admiral Leahy, May 25, 1943, FRUS 1943:IV, pp.1-3.

<sup>155</sup> CIPP memo to Secretary of State, March 22, 1943, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division, CIPP Memoranda File, Box 19, US-National Archives.

<sup>156</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to President Roosevelt, June 8, 1943, FRUS 1943:IV, p.921. See also Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p.312.

However, the White House did not take up the proposal right away. The President initially asked Leahy to discuss the matter further with the Secretary of State.<sup>157</sup> The takeover of a private American company would certainly draw criticism from the oil industry and its allies in Congress.<sup>158</sup> Roosevelt sought to avoid negative publicity for his administration. Historians would later argue that it was also typical of the Presidents leadership style to put off crucial decisions. One of Roosevelt's most significant weaknesses "was an unwillingness to face unpleasantness until there was no option but to do so".<sup>159</sup> While another Roosevelt biographer noted: "lacking a general principle by which to make foreign policy, Roosevelt improvised from one situation to another. The result was a jumble of separate and somewhat clashing policies."<sup>160</sup>

The lethargy over the PRC matter prompted Ickes to approach the President himself. Meeting in the White House on June 16, the Secretary of Interior urged the President to come forward with a coherent policy on oil. The civilian economy was drawing on naval reserves to meet its requirements and immediate action was needed to increase the pool of accessible oil. To Ickes surprise the President seemed ignorant of these facts and responded with the suggestion that domestic production would be enough to satisfy American needs. An exasperated Ickes noted that the President "didn't have the least conception of the oil situation in this country".<sup>161</sup> Ickes argued that whatever was left in America's own reserves should be left intact for future use and the U.S. should "buy cheap oil from

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<sup>157</sup> Memo of Admiral William Leahy, June 11, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp. 921-922.

<sup>158</sup> Report of meeting with President Roosevelt on June 16, 1943, in the *Diary of Harold L. Ickes*

p. 7881-7882. Manuscript Division (MSS), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>159</sup> Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance*, p. 12.

<sup>160</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956 p.249. For other works on Roosevelt's personality and leadership style see Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, and Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as a Wartime Statesman*.

<sup>161</sup> Roosevelt-Ickes meeting June 16, 1943, in the *Diary of Harold L. Ickes* pp. 7881-7882



other lands" for immediate needs.<sup>162</sup> Roosevelt however, was not moved and did not authorise any action.

Frustrated at the lack of success with the president, Ickes mobilised support from colleagues in other departments. In a series of meetings held in June 1943 representatives of the Interior, War, Navy and State Departments worked out a detailed proposal for the acquisition of foreign (essentially Saudi) oil reserves to be submitted to the President. All parties unanimously agreed that the Petroleum Reserves Corporation should be created as soon as possible. The issue of control of the corporation, and the type of interest or ownership to be acquired in Saudi reserves, could be "left to further study".<sup>163</sup> Almost as an afterthought it was suggested that certain members of Congress be approached for "their informal approval".<sup>164</sup> With this broad support from both the military and the cabinet Ickes went back to the President to argue for the measure, in doing so he pushed Roosevelt to authorise the creation of the Petroleum Reserves Corporation.<sup>165</sup>

Though many in the State Department had been in favour of the principle behind the PRC, there were differences over the method by which oil reserves would be secured. The Secretary of State was not enthusiastic about the outright purchase of CASOC, believing it better for the PRC to simply engage in a contractual arrangement with the oil company to supply a fixed amount of oil per year. Of particular concern was the possible indication to the Arab world that the United States had

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, Ickes was also anxious to get Presidential approval because through the PRC he would have the ability to initiate considerable control over oil production and distribution.

<sup>163</sup> The meetings took place on June 17, 19, 21, and 24, 1943. Subsequently this report was made part of a joint memorandum and sent to the President. The signatories of the joint memo were Secretary Cordell Hull (State), Henry Stimson (War), James Forrestal (Navy), Harold Ickes (Interior), June 26, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV pp.924-930.

<sup>164</sup> Secretary Cordell Hull (State), Henry Stimson (War), James Forrestal (Navy), Harold Ickes (Interior), June 26, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV pp.924-930.

<sup>165</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vols. I-II, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948, Vol.II, p. 1520. See also Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 310-314.

imperialistic designs on the Middle East.<sup>166</sup> Ownership of CASOC would place a Saudi Arabian national resource and its future economic prosperity squarely in American hands. Although it was certainly necessary for Washington to provide more active and consistent support for American business it preferred to steer clear of overt involvement in the domestic affairs of Saudi Arabia. CASOC personnel had already established a good working relationship with the King, his government and the local townsmen—in a culture very different from that which American officials were accustomed to. State Department officials acknowledged that it would be difficult to find, in significant numbers, American officials who could understand and operate in an Arab environment. CASOC had shown that it could operate the concession on its own and satisfy the interests of the United States as well.<sup>167</sup>

Ironically, Ickes own advisory board was also against the stock purchase of CASOC. It argued that oil resources would be better managed and marketed by private enterprise and venture capitalists. Moreover, any government that tried to enter into the oil business could find itself overextended. The advisors believed that:

Any direct participation by the Government of the United States in foreign oil operations, whether alone or in partnership with private corporations will discourage private enterprise and will not only increase the political complications but will retard the orderly development of the worlds oil resources.<sup>168</sup>

### Oil Company Take Over: A Strategy of Failure

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<sup>166</sup> For State Department's opposition to a government take over of CASOC, see Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II, London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1948, pp. 1520-1522.

Alexander Kirk, the former Minister to Saudi Arabia was also very much against this. See Kirk to Secretary of State, July 27 1943, FRUS 1943:IV, p. 935.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> See report entitled 'A Foreign Oil Policy for the United States' prepared by Foreign Operations Committee of the Petroleum Administrator for War (PAW), November 5, 1943, Secretary of Interior Files, Box 159, Foreign Oil Policy File, Harold Ickes Papers, MSS, U.S. Library of Congress.



However, Ickes believed that Saudi oil would only be secure in the long run if the United States Government was involved. Soon after the president's approval of the PRC initiative Ickes called in oil company representatives, William Rodgers and H.D. Collier. They were informed that in the interest of national security the United States Government would take over, through stock purchase, the entire CASOC operation. The two men were stunned—Ickes noted in his diary: "I found myself looking into the faces of two surprised and shocked individuals. I had literally taken their breath away".<sup>169</sup>

Rodgers and Collier had approached Washington in order to stabilise the relationship between the oil company and the Saudi regime, not to have CASOC taken over. They had no desire to become business partners with government bureaucrats. To do so would be to forfeit enormous revenues and complicate their relationships with other oil companies and foreign governments. Moreover, CASOC had spent millions of dollars on exploration and development of the Saudi concessions---costs which the U.S. Government would be unable or unwilling to reimburse. Both men vehemently objected to the proposal.<sup>170</sup>

Nevertheless, Ickes aggressively pursued the issue and was determined to obtain company acquiescence. In numerous meetings with corporate officials Ickes tried various ways to re-negotiate the proposal. An offer to reduce the government stake in CASOC to 51% was rejected. So too was a bid to allow SOCAL and Texas Oil to each retain one third stake in CASOC—with the remaining third held by Washington.<sup>171</sup> After successive

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<sup>169</sup> *Diary of Harold Ickes*, pp. 8050-8051, MSS, Library of Congress, See also Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p.42 and Yergin, *The Prize*, p.398.

<sup>170</sup> Meeting with Rodgers and Collier, September 15, 1943, *Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, p.8185. See also meetings on October 15, 1943, *Ibid.*, pp.8285-8286. CASOC was offered the task of management and development of the Saudi oil concession as well as a the chance to aid in a government plan to construct a 100,000 (b.p.d.) barrel per day refinery. Rodgers responded that it was unlikely that post war demand for oil would be enough to require such a large capacity refinery and that a refinery with a 35,000 b.p.d. capacity was good enough.

<sup>171</sup> In addition, Texas Oil was demanding that the government also pay out \$40 million to reimburse the company for its investment in exploration and development of the Saudi

meetings Ickes finally concluded that the oil company executives were just unwilling to cooperate. He still needed to obtain their consent to the CASOC take over because despite the wartime necessity of oil, forcibly taking the company over would have caused an uproar throughout American industry and Congress.

Officially the negotiations between the government and the oil companies were confidential but matters were further complicated by leaks to the media. Yet when a front page article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the government was trying to take over the Saudi Arabian concession from two of America's largest oil companies, it caught many in the oil industry by surprise.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, the article stated that the negotiations were not proceeding amicably. Subsequent media reports provided further details on the difficulties surrounding the negotiations. On November 13, 1943 it was reported that the talks had broken down.

Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, had been patiently observing these developments. He had doubts about the wisdom of pursuing the CASOC take over at all costs. Particularly worrying was the damage that would be done to the prestige of the United States. The lack of progress in the negotiations could indicate to Ibn Saud that the United States was not committed to the development of his country's oil resources and the welfare of his kingdom. This in turn, might be used to the advantage of the British and to "serve to build up their post-war position in the Middle East at the expense of American interests there".<sup>173</sup> Moreover, Hull had reports from:

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concession. See Murray Memorandum to Secretary of State, December 14, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV pp.948-949.

<sup>172</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, of 26 October and 13 November, 1943. For the concerns raised by these reports see *FRUS* 1943:IV pp.940-941.

<sup>173</sup> Hull believed that Britain's hold over Ibn Saud came from the \$34 million in aid that she provided between 1940-1943. Secretary of State, Hull to Secretary of Interior, Ickes, Nov. 13, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp.941-943. Fortunately for Washington Ibn Saud was not in the least upset. In fact he considered it "perfectly natural" for the United States Government to become involved in business ventures. This was of course the common policy of the British government so it would have come as no surprise to the King. In fact Ibn Saud seemed to think that it might signify greater American assistance to his country.



sources of unquestioned reliability that influences will be brought to bear upon King Ibn Saud in the not distant future for the purpose of undermining his confidence in the American interest in his country's petroleum resources.<sup>174</sup>

The Secretary believed it foolish to jeopardise America's interests by allowing the PRC initiative to become a tool for increased British influence in Saudi Arabia. It was more effective to approach the British directly and negotiate a comprehensive agreement to resolve oil questions in the Middle East. Hull dispatched a memo to Harold Ickes urging that the PRC plan be held in abeyance because of the harmful effects it was having on America's reputation and future interests.<sup>175</sup>

Ickes however, did not see it this way. He had made it his own personal challenge to secure oil reserves for the United States and was reluctant to relinquish his crusade. The creation of the Petroleum Reserves Corporation was in his eyes, in the best interest of the government, as well as being a means to "strengthen the position of the companies".<sup>176</sup> Ickes also had his sources in the State Department which indicated to him that Ibn Saud did not object to Washington's involvement in the concession. Britain should have no objections to the involvement of the U.S. Government in American corporations when she herself operated in such a manner. Ickes believed that it was vital that United States Government be in a position that "approximates the position of the British Government" in order to maintain American interests in Saudi Arabia.<sup>177</sup> Despite the leaks to the media, the adverse publicity and the potentially unhappy oil corporations Ickes was determined to see the PRC plan go ahead.

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See Ibn Saud's view in Minister Murray to Secretary of State, November 3, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, p.941. The animosity Hull felt towards Ickes can be seen in the *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, pp. 1515-1525.

<sup>174</sup> Secretary of State, Hull to Secretary of Interior, Ickes, Nov. 13, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp.941-943.

<sup>175</sup> Secretary of State, Hull to Secretary of Interior, Ickes, January 5 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp.10-11.

<sup>176</sup> Secretary of Interior, Ickes to Secretary of State, Hull, January 7 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp.13-15.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

President Roosevelt, had been keeping abreast of the increased tension between the Secretaries of State and Interior over the PRC issue. However, the President himself was known to encourage friction among his subordinates so that they would have to come to him as the final arbitrator of disputes.<sup>178</sup> The two were ordered to resolve their differences quickly. Although he chastised his cabinet men, the President did not take a stand himself. He allowed the two men to pursue separate policies, perhaps in order to see who would be the victor. Therefore Ickes was allowed to pursue talks with the oil companies in order to "find out just where the United States stands", while Hull was given clearance to proceed with preliminary discussions with London to settle petroleum questions in the Middle East.<sup>179</sup>

As it turned out Ickes would soon find himself on the weaker ground. In his determined effort to get the Government into the oil business he expanded the PRC plan to include a proposal for the building of a trans-Arabian pipeline stretching from the Arabian Gulf to the Mediterranean. The United States would build, own and operate the pipeline and charge regional oil companies for its use. However, once this news went public, Ickes faced a barrage of opposition from across the oil industry. Many domestic producers balked at the idea of the Government funding a pipeline which would allow cheap foreign oil to flood the American market. Even members of Congress began to take a critical look at the Petroleum Reserves Corporation. A Senate Committee was set up to investigate petroleum policy and the usefulness of the PRC. The collapse of the stock purchase plan and the hostility to the pipeline left Ickes with

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<sup>178</sup> Irwin Gellman, *Secret Affairs: Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995, pp. 11-16. Roosevelt always kept his advisors and cabinet members guessing. Decision making was concentrated in his hands and he frequently made policy without informing the cabinet departments concerned. The Secretary of State would often not know what foreign commitments the President had made. Roosevelt was also known to force individuals who he knew disliked each other to work together.

<sup>179</sup> Roosevelt to Secretary of State, and Secretary of Interior, January 10 1944, *FRUS:V*, p.16.



no more proposals to offer and his efforts to take over the CASOC concession came to an end.<sup>180</sup>

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State had been working hard to establish a dialogue with the British to resolve petroleum issues on a bilateral basis. He set up the Committee on Anglo-American Petroleum Matters to bring together officials from both sides who would establish clear guidelines on the responsibilities of the two governments regarding Middle Eastern oil.<sup>181</sup> An invitation was extended to the Foreign Office for talks in Washington but the response was lukewarm and London first wanted to know the "precise level" at which the talks would be held—whether it would be senior or junior diplomats. They also requested an advance copy of the agenda before they agreed to participate.<sup>182</sup>

In response Hull gave London a detailed proposal on the issues he sought to put on the table for discussion. These ranged from the quantity of oil to be produced and its pricing, to concession rights and the interests of the countries that produced oil in the Middle East. Yet instead of reassuring the Foreign Office this raised more suspicion. London knew that Washington was trying to take over the operations of American oil companies in Saudi Arabia and questions were raised about whether there was also a plan to take over other American oil companies which had stakes in Iraq and Iran. In those countries the oil operations were joint ventures where British firms (and therefore the British government) held the majority stake.

Uneasy about American intentions the British response to the talks was cordial but firm. His Majesty's Government would be willing to discuss oil issues in preliminary stages but the substance of any discussions

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<sup>180</sup> For a more detailed account of these events see Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 95-99. Also Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and the United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945*, New York: Random House, 1968, pp.294-313.

<sup>181</sup> Secretary of State to President, December 8 1943, in Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol.II, p. 1521. For details on the background of the Cabinet Committee that Hull assembled see Baram, *Department of State in the Middle East: 1919-1945*, pp.225-226.

<sup>182</sup> British Ambassador Halifax to Secretary of State, February 7, 1944, FRUS 1944:III, p.94.

had to be "world wide in their general scope and will not be specifically confined to any particular oil bearing region."<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, the Foreign Office wanted the discussions to be held in London by junior officials. Topics of discussion were to be limited to those of a technical nature and any discussion of concession rights was strenuously rejected.<sup>184</sup> There was no desire to provide an opportunity for the United States to acquire rights in the predominantly British run oil concessions in Iraq and Iran.

Under increasing and unwanted attention from Congress and with the media circulating rumours of an Anglo-American disagreement over oil, Roosevelt pushed Hull to begin the discussions and also insisted that no topic be off limits.<sup>185</sup> He wanted the meetings to cover thoroughly all petroleum matters, including concession rights. The State Department also put a great deal of pressure on the Foreign Office, which set off alarm bells in Downing Street. Winston Churchill found the aggressive conduct of the State Department disconcerting. The Prime Minister cabled Roosevelt expressing his concern with what seemed to be "a desire to deprive us of our oil assets in the Middle East on which among other things, the whole supply of our Navy depends".<sup>186</sup> Churchill pointed out that any discussions on oil would certainly arouse discontent in Parliament and that as such discussions should be low key and of a technical nature. Roosevelt provided a direct response to the Prime Minister:

You point to the apprehension on your side that the United States desires to deprive you of oil assets in the Middle East.

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<sup>183</sup> British Embassy to Department of State, February 18, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:III, pp.97-98. For further British views see Ann Orde *The Eclipse of Great Britain: The United States and British Imperial Decline 1895-1956*, London: MacMillan, 1996, pp.149-150.

<sup>184</sup> Memo of Conversation, Petroleum Advisor with Lord Halifax, February 18, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:III, pp.97-98. Also Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p.301.

<sup>185</sup> For the Secretary of State's account of that period see Hull, *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II, p. 1524.

<sup>186</sup> Churchill to President Roosevelt, February 20, 1944, C-583, re-printed Public Record Office material in *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, ed., W. Kimball, London: Collins, Vol. II, 1984, p. 734.



On the other hand, I am disturbed about the rumor that the British wish to horn in on Saudi Arabian oil reserves.<sup>187</sup>

Furthermore the president indicated that he firmly believed that discussions had to be directed from the Cabinet level and that he could not change his position. As the potential for a major breach among allies loomed, Roosevelt assured Churchill that "we are not making sheep's eyes at your oil fields in Iran or Iraq".<sup>188</sup> This was reciprocated by the British Prime Minister who returned the assurance that Britain had no intention of 'horning in' on American interests in Saudi Arabia. However, Churchill was clearly concerned that the United States had post war ambitions in Middle East oil:

Thank you very much for your assurances about no sheeps eyes at our oilfields in Iran and Iraq. Let me reciprocate by giving you the fullest assurance that we have no thought of trying to horn in upon your interests or property in Saudi Arabia. My position on this is, as in all matters is that Great Britain seeks no advantage, territorial or otherwise, as a result of the war. On the other hand she will not be deprived of anything which rightly belongs to her after having given her best services to the good cause. <sup>189</sup>

For Roosevelt this incident proved more than ever the need to come to a basic understanding between the two governments. Fortunately his assurances had calmed British fears and the Foreign Office indicated that it would be sending a delegation for talks in Washington. They still insisted however, that discussions be preliminary and of a technical nature, leaving cabinet level talks to determine the final agreement.<sup>190</sup> A series of meetings were held throughout April 1944 leading to a 'Memorandum of

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<sup>187</sup> President Roosevelt to Churchill, February 22, 1944, R-474/I, *Ibid.*, pp. 744-745. President Roosevelt's comments are also cited in Stettinius to Winant, Feb. 24, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:III, pp.101-102.

<sup>188</sup> President Roosevelt to Churchill, March 3, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:III, p.103.

<sup>189</sup> Churchill to President Roosevelt, March 4, 1944, C-601, *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, Vol. III, pp. 17-18.

<sup>190</sup> See Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, pp.188-189 and Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp.300-304 and Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p.184. .

Understanding'.<sup>191</sup> It was a broad agreement and intentionally vague but it satisfied both sides. The British were pleased with the clauses that stipulated that existing oil concessions would remain unchanged while American negotiators were happy with clauses that indicated government restrictions would not be allowed to impede the development of petroleum resources in the Middle East.<sup>192</sup>

Yet despite Anglo-American progress, problems on the ground were still making the officials in the NEA sceptical. Reports of British interference were still coming from Jeddah and this threatened to broaden the Allied disagreements over Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>191</sup> Memorandum of Understanding, text printed in *FRUS* 1944:III pp.112-115.

<sup>192</sup> Following Cabinet level discussions in July-August an Anglo-American Petroleum Agreement was formally signed. However, opposition from Congress and oil industry leaders meant that the agreement was never ratified. Memorandum of Understanding, text printed in *FRUS* 1944:III, pp.112-115.



## Chapter 7

### Anglo-American Rivalry

In January 1944 the State Department reorganised the Division of Near Eastern Affairs in order to deal with the increasing demands of America's activity and interest in the Middle East. A new, larger entity, the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs was created, consisting of three sub-departments: Near Eastern Affairs (which covered Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Turkey and Greece); Middle Eastern Affairs (covering Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, India, and Iran) and African Affairs (which dealt with all of Africa except, Algeria, Egypt and South Africa).<sup>1</sup>

This recognition of greater American involvement in the Middle East was also manifested in the upgrading of the diplomatic presence in Saudi Arabia to a full time resident Minister. The new Minister, James Moose was based in Jeddah and found that on his first trip to Riyadh, the King lost no time in listing grievances against the British. The complaints concerned the withholding of his share of pilgrimage tariffs from the previous year and the fact that no announcement on the amount of aid that he would be receiving for 1944 had been made. British parsimony had made life extremely difficult and would "ruin his country" if it continued. Moreover, Ibn Saud informed Moose that the only reason he kept ties with Britain was out of concern that "they might loose their restraint on his enemies, such as the Hashemite family".<sup>2</sup>

Though appreciative of past help, the King was clear in his desire to have direct American assistance. Perhaps one day, Ibn Saud told Moose "it might be necessary for Saudi Arabia to look to the United States of America for all its requirements".<sup>3</sup> The newly arrived Minister took Ibn Saud at face value and quickly wired Washington with grave predictions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East*, p.67.

<sup>2</sup> Report of meeting between Moose and Ibn Saud, in Minister Jeddah (Moose) to Secretary of State, April 29, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.695. See also Minister Jeddah (Moose) to Secretary of State, March 13, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.676

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

consequences of Britain's insufficient aid provisions. He suggested that the State Department increase the amount of Lend Lease aid by 20 million riyals for 1944.<sup>4</sup>

The King was tactful in his discussions, always speckling his comments with praise for Britain, but invoking the urgent needs of his people as the reason for appealing for greater American financial involvement. It was typical of his negotiating style, and despite his claims of acute financial woes Ibn Saud would not submit to terms that did not suit him best. A case in point was a British offer to loan him half a million pounds which he refused because London wanted the revenues from the 1944 pilgrimage to act as security. It did not seem odd to the King that he should be complaining of his financial situation to James Moose at the same time he was turning down a loan from Britain.<sup>5</sup> By holding out the King could get outright grants from America instead of having to worry about paying back loans to the British.<sup>6</sup>

The American eagerness to please the King disturbed the British Minister in Jeddah, Stanley Jordan. As a seasoned Foreign Service officer, Jordan felt he knew 'how to treat Middle East potentates'. He had been attempting to implement strict financial controls on the Saudi administration and had planned to withhold further subsidies until fiscal reform was fully implemented.<sup>7</sup> This was part of a general Foreign Office move to cut back its expenditures. Britain had already provided over £8

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<sup>4</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, April 29, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.695.

<sup>5</sup> It did not seem to concern the American Minister that the King had turned down the loan. In fact from the tone of the report it seems that the King was using the example of his refusal to indicate to the Minister how much he desired to reduce reliance on Britain and turn to the United States, *Ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> A 1944 report by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, characterised Ibn Saud's policy as one of "cleverness, tenacity and open mindedness". The report gave high marks to Ibn Saud for managing to play off competing Bedouin interests and for dealing with major powers. If ever the Caliphate issue arose again the OSS believed that Ibn Saud was a prime candidate to take on the role. The OSS was already beginning to classify countries in terms of their communist and nationalist leanings. Office of Strategic Services Report "The Position of Saudi Arabia within the Arab World", February 4, 1944, OSS Research and Analysis Reports 1941-1961, Report # 1652, RDOS, M1221, US-National Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Jordan to Foreign Office December 31, 1943 PRO FO 371/40267/E364/325/25.



million pounds in aid to Saudi Arabia. The Foreign Office believed that "a proportion of the subsidy is wasted" by the inefficiency of the administrative system.<sup>8</sup> Therefore Saudi demands for a 1944 budget of 109 million riyals could not be accepted when an already bloated deficit of 102 million riyals for 1943 was still being carried:<sup>9</sup>

It is apparent that the Saudi Arabian Government have made no effort to cut their coat according to their cloth and that they will spend as much money as His Majesty's Government are prepared to give them.<sup>10</sup>

It was proposed that after June 1944 the Saudi Government should expect a drastic reduction and should reduce its expenditures accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Ibn Saud responded shrewdly. Lamenting his financial and political position the King requested Britain to provide financial experts to advise his administration and a military expert to train his army. The King had appointed his third son, Mansur as the commander in chief of the Saudi army. As Mansur had no formal military experience Ibn Saud sought to obtain British training, preferably with Sunni Muslim instructors, to come immediately to help establish a modern Saudi army. Adding a twist to his request, Ibn Saud mentioned that the Americans had already offered to provide such training but that he preferred Britain to do so. Jordan was suitably impressed by the seeming candor of the King and reported to London: "I cannot stress too strongly the importance which Ibn Saud attached to his request...the King neither wishes their (American) interference in internal administration of the country nor can they supply Moslem officers".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Report entitled 'The Future of Saudi Arabia' part of Baxter Minute, March 16, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/E1775/128/25.

<sup>9</sup> Revenue was expected to be only 37 million riyals. The deficit for 1944 estimated at 72 million riyals. See Minister Cairo (Kirk), to Secretary of State, January 13, 1944, FRUS 1944:V, p. 672.

<sup>10</sup> Foreign Office Minute, February 16, 1944 PRO FO 371/40267/E364/325/25.

<sup>11</sup> Foreign Office to Minister Jeddah, February 12 1944, FO 371/40267/E1127/325/25.

<sup>12</sup> Resident Jeddah (Jordan) to Foreign Office, March 3 1944, PRO FO 371/40267/E1408/325/25.

In a small revision of their earlier decision, the Foreign Office decided to extend subsidy of foodstuffs to Saudi Arabia up till July 31 1944 and to provide £10,000 per month for the running of Saudi missions abroad.<sup>13</sup> Ibn Saud's ploy had garnered some extra benefits. While the Foreign Office wanted Jordan to inform the American Minister of the decision there was concern that this might lead to a sudden unilateral increase by the Americans—something London wanted to avoid.

The American Minister disagreed with the British approach to the problem and believed that the budget tightening measures were coming at completely the wrong time.<sup>14</sup> The King needed to strengthen his realm, and combat his internal foes and the spread of Axis propaganda. Every effort had to be made to provide for the Saudi government's needs. More upsetting to Moose was that he was being kept in the dark about Jordan's meetings with the King during which supply and economic policy issues were discussed. The Americans attempts to glean the nature of the discussions were brushed off.<sup>15</sup> When Moose made his own inquiries he discovered that Jordan had put forward suggestions to set up a British bank and learned of the proposed appointment of a British financial advisor to the Saudi court. Furthermore, he discovered that Jordan was seeking the removal of the head of Mining Operations and Public Works, a senior court official who was friendly towards the United States.<sup>16</sup> Moose cabled Washington about the evasiveness of his British counterpart. He warned that Jordan's intervention in the administrative operations of Saudi Arabia looked "remarkably like an attempt to establish British influence here".<sup>17</sup> Moose strongly advocated that the United States take over the entire supply and financing situation. It was only "with assurance of such

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<sup>13</sup> Foreign Office to Minister Jeddah, March 16 1944, PRO FO 371/40267/E1160/325/25.

<sup>14</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, April 30, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.696. See also Moose to Secretary of State March 30, 1944 in RDOS T1179/R8, US-National Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, April 30, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.696

<sup>16</sup> The official was Najeeb Salha, the head of Mining Operations and Public Works who Jordan believed was grossly negligent in his duties.

<sup>17</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, April 30, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.696.



help the King will be able to resist British pressure. Without it he is vulnerable".<sup>18</sup>

With these fresh reports from Jeddah the Secretary of State notified the President that the British Minister in Jeddah had worked to remove Saudi officials friendly to the United States and had pressured the King to agree to the appointment of a British economic advisor. Efforts were also being made for Saudi contracts with the US Army Corps of Engineers to be diverted to British firms.<sup>19</sup> Hull believed that British pressure might lead to a future demand for a "quid pro quo in oil". The Secretary recommended that the United States grant additional financial and economic assistance to Saudi Arabia "in order to safeguard adequately the American national interest in the great petroleum resources of that country."<sup>20</sup> More importantly, such additional aid should be channelled through a joint Anglo-American aid programme with each side contributing on a fifty/fifty basis. It would be necessary to conduct talks with the British to establish the parameters of the programme.

Presidential approval arrived quickly and a team of State Department negotiators were dispatched to London to begin talks. The so-called Stettinius Mission was named after its head, Under Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius. However, the chief negotiator was Wallace Murray, head of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs.<sup>21</sup> After arriving in the British capital, the American delegation learned that a British Army detachment was en route to Saudi Arabia on a training mission—a development which seemed odd, since an American military mission was

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Hull discusses the nature of the British threat and reports by Moose in his memoirs, Hull,

*The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II pp.1514-1515.

<sup>20</sup> Hull also recommended that a central bank be set up to ensure American influence in the Saudi economy. Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II, pp. 1514. Details of Hull's proposal can also be found in a Memorandum to the President, April 3, 1944, RDOS, Records of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Lot File 57 D298, Box 6, US-National Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Anglo-American negotiations and disagreements on a number of issues during the meetings in England can be seen in Campbell, ed., *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.*, pp. 35-71.

already in Saudi Arabia doing that very same job. Foreign Office officials quickly explained that they were sending Muslim soldiers who could be stationed in Holy cities and who would have greater freedom of movement.<sup>22</sup> However, to the Americans it appeared to be yet another move to put pressure on Ibn Saud.

When this report reached Washington, Secretary Hull ordered the American Minister in Jeddah to keep a close watch on British movements in the country. Moose was instructed to take every opportunity to visit the court and to maintain close ties with the King.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Hull sent a letter of protest to the British Ambassador in Washington complaining about British policy in Saudi Arabia.<sup>24</sup> This was the beginning of a series of communiqués between London and Washington. The Foreign Office believed that the Americans were over-reacting and simply did not appreciate the corrective measures that were being implemented in Ibn Saud's regime. An exasperated Foreign Secretary cabled the Ambassador in Washington:

The State Department must not overlook the fact that in Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere in the East, temptation to play the Americans and us off against each other is very considerable. There is, we fear little doubt that a good deal of graft exists in Saudi Arabian Government circles and our Minister has recently been campaigning against this. In so doing he has to our knowledge earned the enmity of various influential persons.<sup>25</sup>

The Foreign Office laid much of the blame for the awkward relations with Washington on the inexperience of the American Minister in Jeddah. In department minutes the character and integrity of James Moose was often criticised. He was regarded as a "second rate man" who had taken a big

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<sup>22</sup> Winant, US Ambassador in London to Secretary of State, April 27, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.692.

<sup>23</sup> The Secretary actually wanted a more permanent presence and sought to have an American officer appointed to serve at the court of the King—something London claimed was not practical for the United States since only Britain had Muslim military officers, Secretary of State to Moose, April 18, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.687.

<sup>24</sup> The Secretary's letter was forwarded to London. British Embassy, Washington to SOSFA, May 3, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/ E2811.



leap from his previous posting as a junior official in Tehran and had become overwhelmed by his new responsibilities in Saudi Arabia.<sup>26</sup> He was supposedly jealous of the position that his British counterpart had attained in the Saudi court.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the memoirs of Lawrence Grafftey-Smith, the British Minister who succeeded Jordan, described the latter as an irritable man who suffered from chronic flatulence and had formed a dismal opinion of the country in which he served.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, it frustrated the Foreign Office that Washington did not seem to appreciate the long term effects of unrestricted spending and a lack of administrative checks in the Saudi administration.<sup>29</sup> The appetite for largesse among the local population was never ending and unless the King's expenditures were reduced, the amount of financial assistance he requested from the Allies would spiral with each new year. It was essential to put a limit on subsidies and encourage fiscal responsibility. America's compulsive rush to satisfy the King's every whim and fancy without question was not healthy for the local administration and would ultimately harm Britain's hard earned position. As a Foreign Office memo noted:

The Americans are out to bribe, or buy, Ibn Saud and now that the principle of joint interest in Saudi Arabia has been accepted they are trying to force up the price to a point at which we will drop out and they will be left alone.<sup>30</sup>

Washington viewed the situation very differently. An American company had made substantial capital investments in Saudi Arabia and had been entrusted with extracting the principle resource of the country. There could be no doubt that: "the preponderant interest in the Saudi Arabian economy

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<sup>25</sup> SOSFA to Ambassador Washington, May 7, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/ E2811/1407/G.

<sup>26</sup> Several officials berated the conduct of the American Minister in a FO Departmental Minute, May 23, 1944 PRO FO 371/40265/E3105/128/25.

<sup>27</sup> The Foreign Office also warned Jordan to handle Moose carefully and look out for attempts by Ibn Saud to take advantage of friction between allies. FO to Cairo for Jordan (Jeddah) May 7, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/ E2720/1407.

<sup>28</sup> Grafftey-Smith, *Bright Levant*, p.255.

<sup>29</sup> FO Departmental Minute, May 25, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/E3105 .

<sup>30</sup> FO Departmental Minute, May 25, 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/E3105. Also SOSFA to Ambassador Washington, 28 May 1944, PRO FO 371/40265/E3105/1407.

is unquestionably American in character and will presumably remain so for many years to come".<sup>31</sup>

Secretary Hull was willing to acknowledge that due to Britain's historical position and her interests in the East, she had primary *military* responsibility in the region. However, the United States had political responsibility. In a gesture of compromise Hull suggested that Britain send a military officer to head an Anglo-American military mission while Washington would select a financial advisor to serve at the court of the King.<sup>32</sup>

That was not acceptable to the Foreign Office—Britain's economic and political interests in Saudi Arabia were deemed far greater than Washington's. The American analysis of the Saudi economy failed to take into account the steady rise in pilgrimage revenues. A large number of pilgrims were citizens of the British Empire and contributed far more than the 4 million riyals the American oil company paid in royalties each year. Foreign Office calculations indicated that even during the war, up to 40 million riyals were earned from pilgrim dues and this was expected to increase by up to 100% after the war. Therefore, American claims to have the preponderant interest in the Saudi economy were simply a "misconception of the facts".<sup>33</sup>

In looking at official communications from both sides of the Atlantic, it is clear that great efforts were being made to stabilise Ibn Saud's regime through different approaches to the issue. Neither Washington nor London wanted to alienate the King or concede hard won influence on him, and as such Ibn Saud was able to maximise as much aid and assistance as possible both from the United States and Britain.

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Secretary of State to Maurice Peterson, Foreign Office, July 1, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.711-713. This was despite the desire by the U.S. Military to secure Saudi oil concessions either by a government buy out of CASOC or by the oil companies keeping an option for United States Government of not less than 1 billion barrels. See Memo by Army-Navy Petroleum Board Jan 17, 1944 *FRUS* 1944:V p.17-20.

<sup>32</sup> Secretary of State, (Hull) to American Legation Jeddah, May 1, 1944, RDOS, T1179/R4.

<sup>33</sup> Maurice Peterson, Foreign Office to U.S. Secretary of State, July 21, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:Vpp.718-719.



### Anxious Allies

Though anxious about his financial solvency Ibn Saud could not get a definitive response on the exact amount of aid he could expect. It was the summer of 1944 and stocks of food and supplies had dwindled. Gifts and largesse to tribal chiefs were cut back while salaries of government workers were at least four months in arrears. In urgent need of concrete assistance, not simply gestures of aid, Ibn Saud dispatched urgent messages to the British and American Legations. He requested immediate assistance and gave a subtle warning that if he did not receive a positive response—he would go elsewhere for support.<sup>34</sup>

The veiled threat had the desired effect. Fearing the worst, British and American officials, who had been dragging out their meetings in London, decided to conclude negotiations quickly and settle the joint supply issue. Instructions were sent out from London and Washington to ministers in Jeddah that a joint Anglo-American supply programme had been agreed.<sup>35</sup> Immediate dispatch of 40,000 tons of cereals, 4,500 tons of dates and 3,000 tons of sugar could be expected. The King was to be informed that a portion of the goods supplied to him should be sold on the market as a means of raising revenue. The total value of the goods was £3 million. Though Britain would not provide additional financial aid, the United States would give 10 million silver riyals on Lend Lease. In order to maintain the King's subsidies a three month supply of foodstuffs would be kept stored as a reserve in Jeddah.<sup>36</sup>

Rather than being pleased at the settlement of the Anglo-American aid package the King was extremely disappointed. After making numerous

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<sup>34</sup> It was feared that the king might turn to Axis support. Ibn Saud to American and British Governments, June 17, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.706.

<sup>35</sup> The contents of the joint supply programme can be found in a memo from Secretary of State to British Ambassador, Washington, July 1, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p. 711-713 and accompanying British Embassy aide-mémoire, *Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> One of the conditions of this was that the reserve stockpiles would be managed by American/British diplomatic missions. This was to prevent pilfering and embezzlement. The details of the Joint supply programme were worked out in July-August, Minister Jeddah to Secretary of State September 8, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp.736-737.

requests, which had gone unanswered for months he was offered a paltry sum of aid. Lamenting the situation the King reiterated the dire financial situation of his government.<sup>37</sup> The quantity of foodstuffs allocated would not be adequate for the pilgrimage season, let alone for the rest of the year. Deaths due to starvation were reported in southern Hijaz and there were harsh conditions in Najd, as the distribution of food had been suspended because of depleted stocks. There was also a shortage of vehicles for transportation and the distribution of supplies into the interior of the country. Ibn Saud appealed, as he had done many times in the past, for more substantial assistance.

As usual, Moose listened gravely to the Kings' complaints and cabled Washington about the monarch's dissatisfaction. He also informed the British minister about Ibn Saud's statement and was surprised when Jordan expressed doubts about the King's sincerity.<sup>38</sup> It was Jordan's belief that Ibn Saud was actually satisfied with the aid received, despite what the American minister may have heard, and that he was simply trying to get more out of the naïve Americans. The figures of the joint supply programme, which London had submitted, derived from Jordan's own calculations of the annual consumption of foodstuffs and Saudi needs. Jordan's word carried considerable weight in the Foreign Office and his recommendations on the amount of aid that Britain should supply were carefully followed. The King would have to learn to balance his budget and cope with whatever amount of supplies he had.

The American approach was different and was based on the belief that it was better to send more aid than necessary rather than less. British estimates were seen to be too low. Secretary of State, Hull decided that: "in

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<sup>37</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, August 6, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 723-724.

<sup>38</sup> Reports of meetings with Ibn Saud and Jordan, cited in Moose to Secretary of State, June 22 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.710 and August 6, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 723-724. Jordan was aware of the largesse that the King handed out to maintain loyalty and supply the many tribal chiefs living in Riyadh and that there must be extra stocks of foodstuffs kept for that purpose. In June of 1944, food stocks were supposedly down to 1,363 tons but this was just the amount available for general public distribution. In actual fact there were 2,105 tons stocked but the balance was distributed at the Kings discretion.



the absence of accurate statistical data to the contrary, we must accept the King's statement that the quantities scheduled are insufficient to meet his country's needs".<sup>39</sup> Washington would unilaterally increase aid to the King. Moose was asked to inform the King that Washington was consulting with the British Government, which they had to do under the agreement of the joint supply programme, and would expedite the shipment of additional supplies. Moose was also instructed to inform Jordan of these developments.

The British Minister was furious upon hearing of the American plans. He felt that Washington was violating the joint supply agreement by increasing aid of its own accord. Moreover, Jordan could not accept that the King's situation was as desperate as he claimed. He felt that Saudi needs were exaggerated and that the Americans were simply indulging them.<sup>40</sup> It was also very embarrassing for Britain because the Foreign Office had already firmly told the King that the amount of assistance provided in the joint Anglo-American supply programme could not be increased for that year.<sup>41</sup> Though Jordan could not do anything about Washington's move, relations between British and American officials in Saudi Arabia worsened considerably.

In light of the tension between American and British diplomats in Jeddah, Secretary Hull decided that it was time to withdraw James Moose. It was important to bring in someone who could become close to Ibn Saud and move out from the shadow of the British Minister. As a replacement Hull selected Colonel William Eddy—a Marine Corps officer and fluent Arabic speaker. Raised in Beirut, he understood the culture and customs of the Middle East.<sup>42</sup> He had also served as the Naval Attaché in Cairo and

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<sup>39</sup> Hull to American Economic Mission, Middle East, Cairo, August 14, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.727.

<sup>40</sup> Moose to Secretary of State, August 16, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.728.

<sup>41</sup> SOSFA (Eden ) to Emir Faisal, August 22, 1944, cited in *FRUS* 1944:V pp. 731-732.

<sup>42</sup> Eddy himself was willing to be military advisor but reluctant to take on a finance role until specific plans to increase United States aid were established. See Secretary of State to Minister Resident, April 18, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.687.

had been Chief of the O.S.S. in North Africa at the time of the Allied landings.

Eddy would also be given the added advantage of having his post promoted to Minister Plenipotentiary—a promotion which Secretary Hull secured from President Roosevelt just before Eddy's appointment. This was designed to indicate to Ibn Saud the importance with which Washington held Saudi Arabia. However, it made no difference to Stanley Jordan that a new American minister was in place. Anglo-American relations in Saudi Arabia remained "a little precarious".<sup>43</sup> Jordan was still upset at the disruption that the American decision to unilaterally increase aid to Ibn Saud caused to his plans for reform. In response Jordan had his own unilateral declarations to make. He informed Eddy that an Indian Muslim had been selected to act as financial advisor to the King and that he would be followed by representatives of the British Eastern Bank which would be setting up offices in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the British military mission would be strengthened, which would in turn ensure adequate security for warehouses storing food and materiel reserves to prevent local officials from squandering them. Eddy quickly cabled Washington that the British were clearly making every effort to assert themselves.<sup>44</sup>

Ibn Saud also lost no time in nurturing the sympathies of the new Minister. The King sent his advisor Yusuf Yassin to speak with Eddy on an issue of the "greatest importance, in the strictest confidence".<sup>45</sup> The King was certain of President Roosevelt's friendship towards his country and had high expectations of the United States. However, since America had joined the British in providing aid the King found that the combined supply and financial aid package was less than what the British had given for 1943 alone. This was particularly disquieting since the British were ceasing their financial subsidy altogether. Therefore, the net result of

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<sup>43</sup> Grafftey-Smith who replaced Jordan as Minister and got on well with Eddy and spoke highly of the American in his memoirs. See Grafftey-Smith, *Bright Levant*, p.257.

<sup>44</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, September 7, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.734.

<sup>45</sup> Report of meeting between William Eddy and Yusuf Yassin, on September 6, 1944, described in Eddy to Secretary of State, September 7, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V pp. 734-736.



America's participation allowed Britain to be relieved of half of her obligations while Saudi Arabia benefited nothing and in fact lost.<sup>46</sup>

Yassin argued that if the United States was content to have its economic activity reduced and defined by its ally then it should understand if Saudi Arabia yielded to British wishes and interests in order to survive: "Without arms or resources, Saudi Arabia must not reject the hand that measures its food and drink."<sup>47</sup> After all the United States could lose interest after the war, and there was no guarantee of long term commitment to Ibn Saud. After this long build up Yassin came to the point. The King wished to know if there was some way "on a basis that leads far beyond the war" under which Saudi Arabia and the United States could collaborate alone.<sup>48</sup> The King certainly was capable of employing clever approach's to gain points with Washington and perhaps increase rivalry among the allies.

These statements raised concern in the Department Near Eastern Affairs that U.S.-Saudi relations were entering a dangerous phase and that American interests would be compromised either due to British machinations or from the complete financial collapse of the Saudi government. One route to achieving greater American support for Saudi Arabia was through the increased involvement of the U.S. military. The Department was aware that the strategic value of Saudi oil was becoming more apparent to logistics and supply officers who were anxious to fulfil the requirements of the forces fighting in Europe and the Far East. It was

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<sup>46</sup> Barry Rubin states that Yassin blamed the situation on "the machinations of the British" and advocated U.S.-Saudi collaboration to counter Britain's threat. See Rubin, *Great Powers in the Middle East*, p. 56. This author however, after reviewing the Eddy's report of the conversation disagrees with that point. Yassin clearly stated that Ibn Saud regarded Britain as his ally. Yassin told Eddy that it was "understood that neither (the U.S. nor Ibn Saud) wishes a break of confidence or cooperation with the British". In looking at Eddy's report it seems more reasonable to argue that Yassin was trying to embarrass the U.S. by stating that Washington had let its policies be "reduced and defined" by London. The Americans were being chiding into providing greater help. See Report of meeting between William Eddy and Yusuf Yassin, on September 6, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V pp. 734-736.

<sup>47</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, September 7, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.734. This meeting may have been a significant factor in Washington's subsequent decision to increase the amount of cereals to 50,000 tons for 1944.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

hoped that these oil procurement needs would propel the United States towards greater involvement in the Kingdom's affairs.

### The Expansion of U.S. Military Presence

Interest in Saudi Arabia had been steadily growing in the Departments of War and Navy, particularly among the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The CASOC concession in Saudi Arabia was increasingly being recognised as strategically important, being one of only two, wholly American operated oil concessions in the Middle East (the other was in Bahrain).<sup>49</sup> While content to allow the State and Interior Department's to lead on diplomatic matters relating to Saudi Arabia there was an increasing desire for a more active role in oil policy. The unsuccessful bid of the Petroleum Reserves Corporation made it clear to the Joint Chiefs that direct involvement would be necessary. Military planners were to include the fields of eastern Arabia in defence and re-supply strategies of the war and Saudi oil reserves came to be perceived as part and parcel of America's overseas strategic assets, especially as an American company ran the Saudi concession. The Secretary of War, Henry Stimson stated:

Both from a long and short range point of view the most important military interest in Saudi Arabia is oil and closely following this in importance is the right to construct airfields, the use of air space, and the right to make aerial surveys in connection there with.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Secretary of State, Hull to Admiral William Leahy, Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 15, 1943, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division, 1943-1949, Box 1, US-National Archives. The majority of American ventures in the area had British partners as the majority shareholders. This in effect meant that the British Government was in control. The Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) was a prime example of this – American companies had minority shares in concessions in Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar and Oman. An in depth history and development of the IPC from the 1920's can be found in Shwadran, *Middle East Oil and the Great Powers*, Chapter VIII. See especially pp. 246-248 for a breakdown of American and British partners.

<sup>50</sup> Secretary of War to Secretary of State, October 27, 1944, RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy-Petroleum Division, 1941-49, Box 6, US-National Archives. See also *FRUS* 1944:V pp.748-749.



Logistics officers of the U.S. Army Forces in the Middle East (USAFME) and the Air Transport Command were keen to capitalise on the American presence in Saudi Arabia by acquiring air transit rights in the country. By cutting across northern Arabia supply aircraft could shorten the distance on the Cairo to Karachi flights by 212 miles.<sup>51</sup> Not only would this amount to a significant saving on fuel consumption but it would speed the delivery of aircraft, supplies and equipment to the Pacific theatre. Having emergency landing sites and refuelling stations in Saudi Arabia was thought to be one way of improving air travel in the Middle East generally. The State Department gladly approached the Saudi authorities for permission to conduct reconnaissance flights, ground surveys and for clearance to set up an airfield. It seemed a straightforward request and in line with the war effort and an avenue for greater support for Ibn Saud. Few problems were anticipated, but in fact, the Saudi response was not very enthusiastic.

The official reply was rather ambiguous: "studies and discussions to remove great obstacles must precede decision to grant permission or not."<sup>52</sup> Yet behind the scenes considerable tension resulted from the American request. The prospect of allied warplanes crossing over Saudi territory was a contentious issue. The King wanted to know details of air routes, types of surveys, the direction from which aircraft would enter Saudi airspace and the direction in which they would leave. To a largely rural and nomadic population, the sight, as well as sounds, of aircraft passing overhead could incite fear and hostility. There was particular sensitivity to American planes flying over certain populated areas and

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<sup>51</sup> Secretary of War, Stimson to Secretary of State, Hull, October 27, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 748-751. Miller argues that it was in October 1944 when officials in the Near Eastern Affairs office came up with idea of involving the War and Navy departments in paying for the use of facilities thereby increasing revenue for Saudi Arabia, Miller *Search for Security*, p. 118. But the War Department had already developed an interest during March-April of that year. James Gormly however, also supports the March-April time frame, Gormly, 'Keeping the Door Open in Saudi Arabia', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 4, No.2, Spring 1980, pp.189-205.

prohibitions were made on flying over the towns of al-Jauf, Tayma and Hail.<sup>53</sup>

Domestic critics of the King might gain further ammunition to accuse the King of handing over control of the country to foreigners.<sup>54</sup> More importantly there was a great desire to avoid the political complications that would ensue if any of the American aircraft were fired upon causing death or injury to the crew. Though not explicitly mentioned by the King or his advisors there was no doubt a healthy concern for British reaction to the latest American request. The commitment of the United States to Saudi Arabia was by no means assured at that point and Ibn Saud was certainly not confident enough to risk upsetting his old supporter.

The less than immediate Saudi response came as a surprise to Washington and suspicions were aroused of possible British involvement. This seemed well founded after reports indicated high ranking British military officers were averse to the United States gaining preferential air transit rights in what was considered a traditional British military area. Eddy reported:

Most authentic confidential source confirms that British told Saudi Government to refuse aerodrome to US Army at Dhahran. Royal Airforce Chief Cairo stated to same source that Air Ministry London would not concur in US Army request for Dhahran aerodrome.<sup>55</sup>

The State Department called in the Counsellor at the British Embassy, Michael Wright, to explain the situation. In a meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle, the Counsellor was subjected to a barrage of

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<sup>52</sup> These concerns were articulated to the American Minister by Yusuf Yassin, Ibn Saud's acting Minister of Foreign Affairs. See Eddy to Yusuf Yassin, July 29, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.661.

<sup>53</sup> These were towns in the north of the country and areas where the loyalty of beduin tribes were not fully assured.

<sup>54</sup> Minister Eddy to Yusuf Yassin, July 29, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.661.

<sup>55</sup> See Eddy's cable sent via the American Legation in Egypt. Minister in Egypt to Secretary of State, October 6, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.663.



accusations.<sup>56</sup> Berle was furious that Britain had interfered in the American request: "There was no law in heaven or earth which entitled anybody to interfere with our building an airfield for legitimate purposes in Saudi Arabia."<sup>57</sup> The Counsellor assured Berle that His Majesty's Government was not trying to undermine American interests in Saudi Arabia and that there must be some misunderstanding.

After returning to the Embassy Wright did discover, after making his own inquiries, that there had indeed been complicity of the Air Ministry in the matter.<sup>58</sup> He could only suggest that the American War Department approach its counterpart in London, explain the situation in order to gain British support for the airfield in Dhahran.<sup>59</sup> However, the American General Staff was reluctant to do so, fearing that the British Joint

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<sup>56</sup> Wright was the public relations man at the embassy and it was his job to put a positive gloss on Britain and divert criticism of British policy to the United States. See Anderson, Terry. *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War 1944-1947*, London: University of Missouri Press, 1987, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> Memo of conversation by Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle with Michael Wright, Counsellor, British Embassy, October 9, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.664. Berle was the son of a liberal Boston minister who graduated Harvard at 18 and law school at 21. He had served as an adviser to President Wilson at Versailles and was handpicked by Roosevelt to serve in the State Department. The two men shared similar views and Berle had direct access to the President. Berle's attitude to the British official was indicative of the general feeling of the White House. Rubin, *Secrets of State*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Memo of telephone conversation between Wright and Murray Nov. 11, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.668. Royal Air Force officials believed that it was unnecessary for the United States to have an airfield in Saudi Arabia since there was already an American field on Bahrain. However, what the RAF had been unaware of was that the U.S. Army Air Force planned to introduce new, large capacity cargo planes on the supply routes to the Pacific theatre which could not take off and land from the small Bahrain field.

It should also be noted that, during this period there were fundamental differences between British and American approaches to international air transit rights. The United States wanted air transport firms to be able to pick up and discharge cargo or passengers freely along international routes. Britain did not wish to have free open movement but sought controlled and restricted flights—feeling threatened that in the long run American capitalism and air superiority would overwhelm British carriers. It was at a session of the International Civil Aviation Conference held in November 1944 in Chicago that America hoped to have its proposals—termed the Fifth Freedom adopted as international policy. However Britain strongly opposed the measure. British aviation and RAF officials had axes to grind because of this issue. See Alan Dobson, *Peaceful Air Warfare: The United States, Britain and the Politics of International Aviation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Also Crane Brinton, *The United States and Britain*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945, pp. 177-181. The summer of 1944 also saw an Anglo-American dispute over civil air rights in Iran which was sparked by American attempts to secure American landing rights at Abadan. See *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 486-497.

Staff would demand shared use of the Dhahran base.<sup>60</sup> Since it had no desire to share facilities, the War Department took matters into its own hands. Major General Benjamin Giles, Commander of USAFME was sent to the eastern province of Saudi Arabia to assess the situation himself. Giles arrived with a team of engineers who conducted surveys and took soil samples. It is not clear, whether Giles received prior Saudi Government permission for his mission since there appeared to be no official Saudi welcome or acknowledgement of the General's visit. Giles did meet briefly with U.S. officials in Dhahran but not with senior Saudi ones. By the time he left, less than 24 hours later, the General was satisfied that he had found a suitable site to build an American air base near the town of Dhahran.<sup>61</sup> However, the success of the mission was clouded by the discovery that two British officers also arrived in Dhahran from Bahrain around the same time as General Giles. Dressed as civilians, the two men were on a scouting mission of their own—to find a suitable site for an RAF airfield in Saudi Arabia.

The American response was angry. Secretary of State Hull sent a stern letter to the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, complaining that British policy on the ground seemed the opposite of the co-operation that London sought to cultivate.<sup>62</sup> Hull asserted that he had reports from the field implicating the British Minister in Jeddah as well as the Air Ministry in London of interfering in the matter of landing rights. It seemed

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<sup>59</sup> Memo of telephone conversation between Wright and Murray Nov. 11, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.668.

<sup>60</sup> In a Memo from the War Department to the NEA it was pointed out that "The Army Air Forces considers that joint tenancy of the Dhahran airfield with British forces would be most undesirable". Memo Colonel John Bowen, War Department General Staff to NEA, November 22, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V p.669.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Consulate, Dhahran to Secretary of State Oct. 12, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V p. 665. (The United States opened a Consulate in Dhahran March 4, 1944). See Moose to Secretary of State, March 4 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.659. In discussions with ARAMCO the King indicated that he had more confidence in the long term assistance of the British, rather than the Americans. The Americans worried that Ibn Saud's confidence in the United States was at an all time low.

<sup>62</sup> Secretary of State (Hull) to SOSFA, Foreign Office, cited in Secretary of State to US Ambassador, London (Winant) October 17, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp.666-667.



like "a reversion to a dog eat-dog-policy".<sup>63</sup> For Hull, it was clear that to depend on wartime economic and military aid to ensure the financial stability of Ibn Saud was not a feasible long term strategy. The United States Government would have to assist in some concrete way, not only during wartime but for some time afterwards, in order to maintain the stability of Saudi Arabia. To do otherwise would leave the Kingdom reliant on Britain and subject to the whims of parsimonious colonial officials.

### The Changing of the Guard

The NEA devised a five year financial subsidy package that would provide Ibn Saud with \$57 million over a five year period from 1945-1950.<sup>64</sup> It was hoped that this would cover the deficits of the Saudi administration until such time that pilgrimage and oil revenues could balance the budget. The majority of this, some \$37 million, would represent payment for oil reserves that would be maintained for use by the U.S. Navy. A further \$20 million was to be paid by the War Department for air transit rights and for the building of airfields. The proposal was passed to the Secretary of State and was deemed "a relatively small investment" to protect American interests in Saudi Arabia.<sup>65</sup>

However, before the proposal could be fully examined Cordell Hull, aged seventy three and suffering from ill health, resigned as Secretary of State.<sup>66</sup> The strain of wartime responsibilities had exhausted him and he no longer felt capable of physically keeping up with the demands of the post. Hull left office on November 27, 1944 and was succeeded by his long time

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. For Eddy's reports on British obstruction of American interests see Eddy to Secretary of State, Nov. 24 and 28 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V pp.752-753. Eddy remarked "Jordan will lead British effort to embroil us in resentment of King by proposing drastic reduction in subsidy".

<sup>64</sup> Chief of NEA, Murray to Under Secretary of State, Stettinius, November 11, 1944, in RDOS, Office of International Trade Policy: Petroleum Division 1943-1949, Box 6, US-National Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hull was suffering from the dual effects of diabetes and tuberculoses. He had been diagnosed with these problems as far back as the summer of 1932 – well before becoming Secretary of State. He hid his illness from the public and perhaps from the President as well. See Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II p.1255.



deputy, Edward Stettinius.<sup>67</sup> Stettinius was inexperienced in foreign affairs and was known more for his administrative skills. Before the war he had been an executive in the U.S. Steel company. His appointment to the State Department in September 1943 was in part an attempt to solve the Department's administrative woes. Among his contributions was serving as lend lease administrator and reorganising the Department's internal structure, including the creation of twelve new offices. This included four geographical offices which were made directly responsible to the Under Secretary of State.

As previously mentioned the Division of Near Eastern Affairs became part of the larger Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (ONEA) with Wallace Murray as its new director.<sup>68</sup> Stettinius also made appointments of two men to Under Secretary of State—Joseph Grew, a career diplomat and Dean Acheson a fiery lawyer. Both men were methodical administrators and would greatly influence American policy towards Saudi Arabia. Joseph Grew often stepped up to the post of Acting Secretary of State during Stettinius' frequent trips to Europe.

Fortunately for Ibn Saud, Stettinius was already apprised of the situation in Saudi Arabia and pursued an active policy to protect American relations with the kingdom.<sup>69</sup> First, he instructed the American Minister in Jeddah, William Eddy to reduce information sharing with the British

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<sup>67</sup> Hull's retirement would leave a significant gap in the administration's relations with Congress and in dealing with foreign affairs generally. His replacement was believed to be someone who would not challenge President Roosevelt's control over policy, Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 502-503. Stettinius account of his experiences can be found in Thomas Campbell, and George Herring, eds., *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr.* New York: Franklin Watts, 1975.

<sup>68</sup> The number of State Department employees also increased. The figure had risen from 974 in 1939 to 3,767 by 1945. The numbers of foreign service officers rose from 3,730 to about 7,000. See Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p. 234, fn56.

<sup>69</sup> Stettinius also benefited from the efforts of his predecessor in developing the interest of the military. In addition to the War Department and the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of the Navy came to believe that American control of Saudi oil was important for retaining American prestige and bargaining power in international agreements. With Pacific theatre operations expecting to increase and post-war demands for petroleum supplies likely to be high it was "patently in the Navy's interest that no part of the national wealth be lost at this time". Secretary of the Navy to Secretary of State, December 11, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.755-756.



Minister Stanley Jordan. Meetings between Eddy and the King were to be kept confidential.<sup>70</sup> The nature of such discussions with the King should not be relayed to Jordan unless the King specifically requested that the British be informed. More importantly, Eddy was not to consider any proposals by Jordan that would reduce aid to Saudi Arabia. Stettinius also informed the Foreign Office of the instructions sent to Eddy, to emphasise the point that Jordan was hampering Allied cooperation.<sup>71</sup>

Second, Stettinius revived the NEA proposal with the White House and sought permission to submit a bill to Congress for a multi-million dollar aid package for Saudi Arabia. The President was amazed that an oil producing country could be in such financial hardship, and asked in incredulity: "what the hell they were doing with all the money".<sup>72</sup> Stettinius had to make a persuasive case to convey to the President the need to assist the Kingdom :

If such help is not provided by this Government, undoubtedly it will be supplied by some other nation which might thus acquire a dominant position in that country inimical to the welfare of Saudi Arabia and to the national interest of the United States.<sup>73</sup>

However, Stettinius also realised that Congress would only grant approval if it was assured that the subsidies to Saudi Arabia were not for the benefit of a single private corporation—i.e. CASOC, (which in December 1944

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<sup>70</sup> Secretary of State to Minister Jeddah, December 24, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 756-757. See also Secretary of State to Minister Jeddah, December 9, 1944, *Ibid.*, pp. 755.

<sup>71</sup> The British Ambassador remarked that "with Hull's departure and Stettinius's appointment as Secretary of State, the direction of foreign policy was taken over by what in fact amounted to a small committee composed of members of the White House and the State Department" in Annual Report and Political Review of the United States for the First Quarter of 1945, Halifax (British Ambassador, Washington) to SOSFA (Eden) June 16 1945, re-printed in Hachey, ed., *Confidential Dispatches: Analyses of America by the British Ambassador 1939-1945*, p.264.

<sup>72</sup> Stettinius meeting with FDR, December 22, 1944, in Campbell, ed., *The Diaries of Edward Stettinius, Jr.*, p.204.

<sup>73</sup> Stettinius to Roosevelt, December 22, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 757-759. It should be noted that that James Gormly in his article 'Keeping the Door Open in Saudi Arabia', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 4., No.2, Spring 1980, attributed the above cited remarks to President Roosevelt to indicate the importance that was given to aid for Saudi Arabia. Yet as has been shown here these words are actually those of the Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius.



became known as the Arabian American Oil Corporation—ARAMCO). Domestic oil corporations would certainly oppose any such legislation. Unwilling to rely solely on Congressional funding Stettinius also made submissions to the Export-Import Bank to gain development loans. It was hoped that military projects would also bring services, supplies and equipment to Ibn Saud's government. The King was certain to "adopt a much more independent attitude" towards Britain if he was assured that the United States would "extend aid on a long term basis".<sup>74</sup> In the meantime Stettinius planned to carry over the 1944 programme into 1945 until Congress approved the concrete plans for long term funding. Stettinius also hoped to increase the output from Saudi oil fields to provide revenue for Ibn Saud. Oil company officials however, made it clear that wartime conditions would not allow for significant increases to production particularly with materials and equipment needed for expanded drilling still subject to rationing.<sup>75</sup>

Stettinius wanted Ibn Saud to know of the great efforts being made in Washington to obtain assistance for his country. Eddy met privately with the King to reassure him that a substantial financial and economic aid package would be provided on a long-term basis.<sup>76</sup> Though pleased with the news, Ibn Saud was more interested in making another complaint about the British Minister. While the American Minister was deemed as someone of 'goodness and honour' the British Minister was another matter:

Jordan is our enemy and an enemy of the USA too. To the extent of his power he has sought to prevent our good relations and to injure my country. Except for his evil

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<sup>74</sup> Secretary of State (Stettinius) to Roosevelt, December 22, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 757-759. Following this Stettinius began frequent trips to Britain and Europe and became more involved in Allied strategy and post war planning. His deputy, Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew took on the role of day to day policy management as Acting Secretary of State. In fact, of the 240 days Grew served in office, 166 were as Acting Secretary of State. See Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East*, p. 144 and Kuniholm, *The Orgins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p.235.

<sup>75</sup> Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, December 22, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p. 757-759.

<sup>76</sup> Secretary of State to Eddy, December 24, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, p.759.



influence I am sure the mutual interests of Saudi Arabia and the USA would have developed more rapidly months ago.<sup>77</sup>

Once this report reached Washington the Secretary of State had had enough. The Foreign Office realised that despite Jordan's sincere efforts to follow policy, relations with United States were strained because of him. Jordan was recalled and on February 7, 1945, Lawrence Grafftey-Smith replaced him as British Minister in Jeddah. By the time the new Minister settled in Ibn Saud was embarking on a historic meeting with President Franklin Roosevelt—a meeting that marked the beginning of America's close interest in Saudi Arabia.

### A Historic Meeting

In January 1945 Allied leaders, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met in Yalta to discuss the post war agenda. Among the topics discussed were the United Nations Organisation and trusteeship over the colonies of Axis powers. One issue of particular concern to Roosevelt was the Middle East—especially Palestine. It was here at Yalta that several historians claim the President came up with the idea enlisting the aid of the King of Saudi Arabia on the issue.<sup>78</sup> Since the United States had provided significant assistance to the King and the State Department had always noted the influence that Ibn Saud had on the Arab world Roosevelt felt it time to meet the desert King.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Eddy was surprised at the extent of the animosity with which the King held forth about the British Minister. Report of Meeting with Ibn Saud in Eddy to Secretary of State, January 1945, *FRUS 1945:VIII*, pp.846-847.

<sup>78</sup> Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 511-512 and Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Rendezvous with Destiny*, pp. 582-592. Details of the preparations and discussions surrounding the Yalta Conference can be found in *FRUS 1945: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1955.

<sup>79</sup> Roosevelt had also been approached by Jewish leaders in the United States who sought his help to pass a bill in Congress endorsing the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This raised concerns about the controversy it could create with Britain, particularly after the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British Minister of State for the Middle East and opposition from Arab countries. However, Roosevelt's military advisors were opposed to the bill. Such a bill had the potential for creating conflict in the region which might require the diversion of vital Allied troops to the Middle East when all

However, the idea of meeting with Ibn Saud and discussing Palestine was in fact something the President had been thinking of for some time.<sup>80</sup> According to the notes of Edward Stettinius, Roosevelt articulated strong personal views on the subject in a November 1944 meeting with senior State Department officials:

The president feels confident, however, he will be able to iron out the whole Arab-Jewish issue on the ground where he can have a talk. He thinks Palestine should be for the Jews and no Arabs should be in it, and he has definite ideas on the subject. It should be exclusive Jewish territory.<sup>81</sup>

There has been much historical discussion about Roosevelt's personal views on Palestine. To his advisors, the President made it appear that the issue could be resolved through personal diplomacy. Presidential advisor David Niles records that Roosevelt privately said he could "do anything that needed to be done with Ibn Saud for a few million dollars".<sup>82</sup> It was his single-minded determination to accomplish the task himself which led the President to keep his intentions secret from other leaders at Yalta. Instructions were sent to the American Minister in Jeddah to make arrangements quietly. Only on the last day of the Yalta Conference did

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resources were required for the war in Europe. See Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>80</sup> See also Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, pp.434-446. However, in meetings with Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius in November 1944 Roosevelt made clear references to his desire of meeting Ibn Saud for the purpose of solving the Palestinian issue, 'Calendar Notes' of meeting of November 10, 1944 and November 15, 1944, *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius*, pp.170 and 174 respectively.

<sup>81</sup> 'Meeting with President Roosevelt', November 10, 1944, *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius*, p. 170. Present at this meeting were Secretary Hull and Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius.

<sup>82</sup> Niles Memorandum, 26 May 1946, Official File #204, Truman Papers, Harry Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri, USA, cited in Miller, *Search for Security*, p.200. Although the memo was written more than a year later it indicates Roosevelt's attitude towards Ibn Saud prior to the meeting. Roosevelt had also made plans to meet with King Farouk of Egypt and Haile Selassie of Ethiopia so the meeting with Ibn Saud was following a pattern and may not have been as unique as is sometimes portrayed.



Roosevelt mention to Churchill that he was going to meet with the Saudi monarch.<sup>83</sup>

A warship U.S.S. *Murphy* was dispatched to pick up Ibn Saud in Jeddah on February 12. From there the *Murphy* would rendezvous with the President's ship—the destroyer USS *Quincy*, at the Great Bitter Lake in the Gulf of Suez.<sup>84</sup> During the two day journey aboard the *Murphy* the King was entertained with demonstrations of the ships firepower and a deployment of depth charges. John Keating, the Captain of the vessel noted that the King quickly tired of these displays and chose to retire to the large tent that had been erected on the ships' deck. The remaining Saudi party had preferred to remain above deck since most had "probably never been on a boat so large, and some had never even seen the sea before".<sup>85</sup>

The King had also given strict instructions to maintain contact with Jeddah where his son Prince Faisal was in charge. It became the duty of one court official to frequent the ship's communications room to verify that all was well in the Kingdom. The radio operator was intrigued at first by the transmission he was asked to send. It consisted of the only word in the international code that the Saudi official seemed to know—"OK". After a short pause the reply from shore would come—"OK". However, intrigue

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<sup>83</sup> Roosevelt had worried that the conference would drag on with arguments raging over exact wording of agreements. On February 10 he warned Churchill that he would be leaving the following day to meet with Ibn Saud, King Farouk of Egypt and Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. Churchill was so alarmed by Roosevelt's meetings with Middle Eastern leaders that he quickly arranged to meet them himself. See Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973, pp.202-203.

<sup>84</sup> Minister Jeddah (Eddy) to Secretary of State, February 21 1945, RDOS, T1179/R3/2-2145. The importance of this meeting was highlighted by the Deputy Minister of Information of Saudi Arabia, Fouad Al-Farsy in a lecture given in Houston, Texas, on October 16 1986, which was printed as 'Saudi American Relations in a Changing World' in *Arab-American Affairs*, Winter 1986-87, No. 19, pp.23-27. A detailed account of this meeting is also provided in Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, pp.434-446, which contains interviews with a number of those present during the visit including; Secret Service agents, the President's Naval Attache-William Rigdon, members of the ships crew, Captain John C. Keating as well as Anna Roosevelt, the President's daughter who had accompanied her father on the trip. Other sources for this meeting are William Eddy, *FDR Meets Ibn Saud*, New York: AFME, 1954; Warren Kimball, *Forged in War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Second World War*, London: HarperCollins, 1997, pp.318-319; Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, pp. 593-594.

<sup>85</sup> Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, p.436.



later turned to exasperation as the radio operator was tasked to repeat this exact routine every half hour, on the hour — day and night for two days.<sup>86</sup>

Modern observers of the Middle East may find it fitting that the first meeting between a President of the United States and a King of Saudi Arabia took place on Valentines Day, February 14, 1945—given that it marked the beginning of an intimate and politically charged relationship that would prove to be one of the closest in the Middle East this century. Yet during this first encounter, aboard the USS *Quincy*, there was a certain amount of posturing by both leaders. The King sought greater American aid and support for Arab causes, while the President was keen to assess what role the King might play in achieving American foreign policy objectives. The two leaders sat for several sessions with William Eddy acting as interpreter. Also present, at various stages of the discussions were Presidential advisor, Harry Hopkins and Assistant Secretary of State, Charles Bohlen.

As discussion ensued Roosevelt brought up the issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine. In response Ibn Saud asked why the Allies did not turn over the 'choicest lands and homes of the Germans' to the Jews instead—making the oppressors pay for their aggression. The King did not understand why the Allies could not force the Germans to take responsibility for Jewish refugees.<sup>87</sup> If in fact Germany could not support all the survivors of the war, then the Allied nations should absorb them within their own countries. <sup>88</sup> Jewish immigrants from Europe were culturally different from the Arabs of the Middle East. They also had

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<sup>86</sup> The *Murphy's* radio operator was so bewildered by the constant repetition of the same message that he asked the chief communications officer of the *Quincy* if there was some greater significance to the phrase "OK? OK", Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, p.436.

<sup>87</sup> The King had registered his concern about United States policy in Palestine as early as 1938 in a letter to President Roosevelt, November 29, 1938, *FRUS* 1938:II, pp.994-998. See also Ibn Saud to Roosevelt, April 30, 1943, *FRUS* 1943:IV, pp.773-775. The King's letters are also re-printed in *Almana, Arabia Unified*, pp.286-292 and pp 298-301 respectively. For American accounts of these discussions see Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, p. 594; Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, pp.444-445.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Saud's views on Palestine have also been articulated in Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp.335-337 ; Van Der Meulen, *The Wells of Ibn Saud*, p. 134; Lacey, p.271, and McLoughlin, pp. 164-165.



greater technical knowledge and skills that would allow them greater economic prosperity at the expense of the Arabs.<sup>89</sup> Although "at no point did the King become rancorous", he did complain about the granting of millions of dollars of American and British aid to the immigrants to build farms and cities.<sup>90</sup> Such funds and proper training could be given to the local Arabs to build those things. Ibn Saud argued that Jewish forces were "armed to the teeth, not to fight Germans but to fight Arabs".<sup>91</sup>

According to Bohlen, "Ibn Saud's calm and reasoned statement had a profound effect on Roosevelt".<sup>92</sup> William Eddy also reported that the President was caught off guard by the candour of Ibn Saud. He was surprised at the confidence and determination with which the King spoke.<sup>93</sup> However, despite his boast of being able to do what he wanted with Ibn Saud, Roosevelt did not pressure the King to support American policy in Palestine — nor did he attempt to link the issue with American aid. In fact, the President reassured Ibn Saud that the United States would not make hostile moves against the Arabs and that the King would be consulted prior to any final settlement. Also discussed was the post war situation and how Saudi Arabia could benefit by joining the new international system under the United Nations Organisation.<sup>94</sup> The King agreed to send his son Amir Faisal as head of a Saudi delegation to attend the inaugural ceremony of the United Nations in San Francisco.<sup>95</sup>

Although Roosevelt had not obtained support for Jewish immigration into Palestine he nevertheless felt that he had met a noble

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<sup>89</sup> Bohlen, *Witness to History*, p. 203

<sup>90</sup> Harry Hopkins, Presidential Advisor, who was present during the meeting, cited in Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, p.445.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Assistant Secretary of State, Charles Bohlen was also present aboard the Quincy. Bohlen, *Witness to History*, p 204.

<sup>93</sup> Minister Jeddah (Eddy) to Secretary of State, March 3, 1945, RDOS, T1179/R3/3/345. Also Eddy, *FDR Meets Ibn Saud*, pp.29-31. For accounts of this meeting taken from the interviews of the President's Naval Attaché and Secret Service Agents, see Bishop, *FDR's Last Year*, pp. 434-436.

<sup>94</sup> Kimball, *Forged in War*, pp. 318-319, also Eddy, *FDR Meets Ibn Saud*, pp.29-31. In order to satisfy the requirements of becoming a founding member of the United Nations Organisation, Saudi Arabia had to formally declare war on Germany.

<sup>95</sup> McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud*, p.168.

and respected Arab leader. Ibn Saud had not changed Roosevelt's views on Palestine but the King believed that he had received assurances that Arab wishes would be honoured. When the President returned to Washington he instructed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assist in the building of infrastructure projects, road works, airfields and to provide other necessary services to Saudi Arabia.<sup>96</sup>

Soon after, in a speech to Congress on March 1, 1945 Roosevelt lavished praise on the Saudi ruler. The President remarked that he had learned more about the Middle East in a five minute conversation with Ibn Saud than in the exchange of two or three dozen letters.<sup>97</sup> Roosevelt was also keen to support Congressional funding for Saudi Arabia. Following his speech to Congress, Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson and the staff of the NEA organised several meetings with members of the House of Representatives and Senate leaders to discuss plans for more aid to Saudi Arabia.<sup>98</sup>

On March 8, Acheson and his staff, along with officers from the Army and Navy met with the Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn; the chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, Carl Vinson, and the majority floor leader, John McCormack. During the course of the meeting Acheson briefed the group on the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia and in its capacity as a major oil producer. Though the United States and Britain had provided assistance through Lend Lease, there was still an anticipated Saudi deficit of at least \$50 million over the next five years. If this deficit was not met the stability of the Saudi government would be compromised and would threaten the American hold on oil concessions.

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<sup>96</sup> Roosevelt's final actions concerning Saudi Arabia were detailed in Acting Secretary of State (Joseph Grew) to President Truman, May 23 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 900-901. In this despatch the Secretary was updating the new President on the status of American-Saudi relations as conducted by Roosevelt. See also Bohlen, *Witness to History*, p. 204

<sup>97</sup> Address to Congress by President F.D. Roosevelt, March 1, 1945, text printed in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Volume 4, 1944-1945, New York:Harper Bros., 1950, p. 584.

<sup>98</sup> State Department Memorandum of Conversation, March 8, 1945 Participants: Acheson, Kane, Bard, Vinson, Drewry and McCormack, RDOS, T1179/R3/3-845, See also *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 861-863.



The immediate response of the Army and Navy representatives was to propose the construction of an airfield at Dhahran and to maintain Saudi oil to relieve the drain on American reserves.<sup>99</sup>

Acheson indicated that if Congress was inclined to offer support, there were several methods by which aid could be channelled: by an outright grant; a government loan that would be secured by oil deposits; or by an unsecured loan that would be repaid from revenues derived from the sale of oil. Speaker of the House Rayburn looked favourably upon the proposal, as did the other members. Nevertheless they advocated that the State Department take an indirect approach in dealing with Congress because "if the entire matter were stated at some length in a bill this would require extensive hearings in which strong attitudes might be taken by various private interests".<sup>100</sup> It was recommended that proposed legislation should not specify the purpose of the funds, except in the most general terms. The Secretary of State should be left to dispose of the funds through the State Department but would be accountable to relevant Congressional committees. Furthermore any proposal for aid would stand a better chance if it were on a *quid pro quo* basis, with Saudi oil being provided to the U.S. military at a reduced rate. In consultation with Senate leaders a plan was formulated to fund Saudi Arabia through Export Import Bank loans. It was left to Acheson to draw up detailed proposals before proceeding with drafting legislation.<sup>101</sup>

Acheson was also advised to watch out for opposition from Senators E.H. Moore of Oklahoma and Tom Connally of Texas who, along with friends in the domestic petroleum lobby, did not favour Washington subsidising

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>State Department Memorandum of Conversation : Acheson, Kane, Bard, Vinson, Drewry and McCormack, March 8, 1945, RDOS, T1179/R3/3-845. Also FRUS 1945:VIII, pp. 861-863

<sup>101</sup> The response from Senate leaders was also favourable. The Senate Majority Leader, Barkley informed Acheson that they were "unanimous in their opinion that some action was required" to ensure the American hold on the Saudi concessions. Memo of meeting between Acheson and Senators Barkley, George and Walsh (Barkley was Senate Majority Leader; George was Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and Walsh was Chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee), May 17, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, pp. 895-896.

foreign oil operations—nor would they be supportive of long term post-war aid to foreign governments. They opposed government interference in private industry in general and believed that investment in petroleum deposits within the United States should be the focus.<sup>102</sup> Even the Lend Lease Act which provided a lifeline to Allied forces during the war had been opposed by such hard line politicians and their lobbyists.<sup>103</sup>

With complications looming in Congress the feeling among senior State Department officials was pessimistic. With the failure of the Petroleum Reserves Corporation venture officials were:

quite certain that similar opposition will develop against any proposal for either the purchase of a foreign oil reserve by the Navy, or the use of U.S. Government funds to keep King Ibn Saud favourably disposed towards the private American company now holding the oil concession.<sup>104</sup>

Dean Acheson attempted to keep options open and continued to work on other channels, especially the Export-Import Bank.<sup>105</sup>

### The Death of Roosevelt

The sudden death of President Roosevelt on April 12, 1945 threatened to derail the entire aid process. His successor, Harry Truman had only been Vice President for eighty-two days and apart from Cabinet

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<sup>102</sup> Memo of meeting between Acheson and Senators Barkley, George and Walsh—(Barkley was Senate Majority Leader, George was Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and Walsh was Chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee), May 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 895-896.

<sup>103</sup> For background on the Lend Lease Act see Warren Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend Lease, 1939-1941*, Baltimore, 1969, particularly chapters 1-3; Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War*, pp. 160-172. For an account of Congressional reluctance to grant foreign aid, which was written during the war. See Brinton, *The United States and Britain*, pp.163-164. Also Stephen Ambrose, and Douglas Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, New York: Penguin, 1993. pp.6-8.

<sup>104</sup> Asst. Secretary of State Clayton to Asst. Secretary of State, Dunn, April 7, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 869-871.

<sup>105</sup> The subsequent problem with loans involved getting approval to take Saudi oil as collateral for loan security. Memo of meeting between Acheson and Senators Barkley, George and Walsh (Barkley was Senate Majority Leader, George was Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and Walsh was Chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee), May 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 895-896.



meetings, had met Roosevelt only twice in that period.<sup>106</sup> Truman knew little of foreign affairs and less still about Roosevelt's policies but found himself thrust suddenly into the Presidency at a crucial time. Moreover, Truman had not been privy to many of his predecessor's decisions and he leant heavily on Roosevelt's advisors to guide him. Truman had not been involved in the discussions on Saudi oil nor was he familiar with details of the debate over the Petroleum Reserves Corporation.

Nevertheless, the State Department was anxious for the new President to take action on Saudi oil. Joseph Grew, then Acting Secretary of State, briefed Truman on the importance of Saudi oil. Grew noted that there was support available from members of Congress who had been consulted on the issue of aid to the Kingdom and that they required further cultivation:

All agreed that, because of Saudi Arabia's strategic position in relation to the Pacific War, and even more importantly, because of its vast oil resources now under concession to American nationals the United States has a vital interest in the stability of Saudi Arabia.<sup>107</sup>

Additional briefings were given to the President by the Under Secretary of the Navy, Ralph Bard and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson. However, Truman did not get to hear from Wallace Murray, one of the State Department's strongest supporters of Ibn Saud. Murray had left Washington to become Ambassador to Iran. His replacement as head of the Division was Loy Henderson, an Eastern European specialist who had only

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<sup>106</sup> Truman became Vice President on January 20 1945 when Roosevelt was sworn in for a fourth term. He was appointed to replace Henry Wallace. Though he had been a Senator, Truman did not have experience, nor did he show any interest, in foreign affairs. He was particularly handicapped by not knowing Winston Churchill and the relationship between the two men got off to a strained start. See John Dickie, *Special No More: Anglo American Relations, Rhetoric and Reality*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994, pp.28-29. For full biography of Harry Truman see David McCullough. *Truman*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

<sup>107</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to President Truman, May 23, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 900-901.

See also Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 136-137.

brief experience in Iraq and knew little about Saudi Arabia.<sup>108</sup> Henderson did not have the same fiery temperament as Murray. Nevertheless, Truman could see the necessity of approaching Congress for aid to Saudi Arabia. Grew was given the green light to propose legislation for a comprehensive financial assistance package for Saudi Arabia. That was what Roosevelt had endorsed and Truman, seeking to continue his predecessor's policies, followed through.<sup>109</sup>

However, the process of approval on an aid package would be long and drawn out and urgent appeals from Ibn Saud had increased since Roosevelt's death, partly out of concern that the United States might forget its new friend.<sup>110</sup> Reassurance came from the Secretary of State that the delays were administrative in nature and that the United States was very much committed to supporting his government. It was hoped that the Anglo-American aid package would soon be finalised and provide much needed relief for the King.<sup>111</sup> One piece of news that was encouraging was that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given the go ahead for the Dhahran airfield project which would bring military assistance to the Kingdom. However, despite this Ibn Saud was unhappy. He was still waiting for the full aid package that would bring foodstuffs, materials and supplies which he desperately needed to distribute as largesse to the tribes. Eddy cabled

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<sup>108</sup> Henderson had served at the U.S. Mission in Moscow in the 1930's and later in the Division of Eastern European Affairs at the State Department. Henderson, like Joseph Grew, had strong anti-Communist sentiments. So much so that in the early days of the war he was an unpopular in Washington. Henderson officially took over as Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs on April 17, 1945. See Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p. 237

<sup>109</sup> President Truman to Secretary of State, May 29, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 902-903.

<sup>110</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, April 16, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p. 873.

<sup>111</sup> Secretary of State (Stettinius) to Eddy, April 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 874-875. The Joint Chiefs had overcome their previous reticence and had approached the British Chiefs of Staff for their support in getting Ibn Saud to approve the plan for an American airfield in Dharhan. The British agreed providing that the Royal Air Force had equal fly over and landing privileges. The Americans were satisfied that there would not be any permanent RAF forces stationed there and the British use of the field would be in case of emergency. The Secretary of State had hoped that this news would be well received by the King but he did not get the anticipated reaction.



the Secretary of State that the King was "troubled, indignant, convinced delay was unnecessary".<sup>112</sup>

More bad news came when the British Ambassador informed the Secretary of State that London intended to make drastic reductions to its subsidies for Saudi Arabia. The British proposal for the year 1945 was to provide the King with a maximum of \$3 million (£1.4 million pounds) — half of what was provided in 1944.<sup>113</sup> This was a time when State Department officials felt it crucial that assistance to Saudi Arabia be increased. The Foreign Office however, argued that their original subsidy had been intended only as a temporary "compensation for the fall in Ibn Saud's revenues from the pilgrimage".<sup>114</sup> Since pilgrim traffic had improved in 1944 and also because the oil company was expected to resume normal activities, Ibn Saud was expected to be in a position to purchase goods on his own account. If Britain was to maintain the large increase for 1945 it would mean that the King's income would be "at least four times higher than it was immediately before the war" and His Majesty's Government felt that there was "no justification for continuing the subsidy on its recent scale."<sup>115</sup> Moreover, London argued that Ibn Saud should, for his own benefit, get off foreign subventions and manage his affairs with the resources he had at his disposal. In fact the Foreign Office was under pressure from the Treasury to reduce foreign subsidies because of the severe drain on the already impoverished British economy.<sup>116</sup>

More disturbing to American officials was London's insistence that Washington also follow suit and cut American aid so that the 50/50 basis of the joint aid programme be maintained.<sup>117</sup> The Foreign Office felt "very

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<sup>112</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, April 20, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 878-879.

<sup>113</sup> Moreover much of that aid would be in the form of foodstuffs such as cereals, sugar and tea, not cash. British Ambassador, Washington, to Secretary of State, April 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 875-877.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> British Ambassador, Washington, to Secretary of State, April 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 875-877.

<sup>116</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951*, p.190.

<sup>117</sup> This meant that the combined British and American assistance would drop to \$10 million.

strongly indeed that the abandonment of the principle of equal partnership would inevitably give the impression of Anglo-American rivalry which on political grounds both governments are anxious to avoid".<sup>118</sup> This was a clear sign of the differing position of the two Allied Governments. The American position was that Saudi Arabia could not go back to pre-war levels of income subsidy because the King needed substantially more assistance to develop the country and stabilise his regime.<sup>119</sup> Gordon Merriam, the chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs was convinced that British meanness was preventing effective government by Ibn Saud and was annoyed at British interference in American-Saudi relations. Merriam and others believed that the King should be left to administer his affairs as he saw best and not be ordered about like a colonial vassal.<sup>120</sup> It was necessary for Ibn Saud to maintain his prestige and to continue to distribute largesse to his subjects. American officials were convinced that the British did not have all the facts about Saudi needs. In the American estimate Ibn Saud would require \$16 million above and beyond 1944 levels to sustain his government properly and only that would "meet the minimum essential needs of that country, both supply and budgetary".<sup>121</sup> The Foreign Office however, was not convinced by American figures and stuck to its own estimates. There was no objection to Washington giving

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<sup>118</sup> British Ambassador to Secretary of State, April 17, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 875-877. It was only later, perhaps in order to pacify Washington, that the British Ambassador made the State Department aware that Britain had informed Ibn Saud that there was no objection to the creation of an American air base at Dhahran. See Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Minister Saudi Arabia (Eddy) April 26, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p. 885. This was significant because Ibn Saud had hesitated granting permission to the United States without prior British approval.

<sup>119</sup> Report entitled *Supplemental United States Supply Program for Saudi Arabia in 1945*, enclosed with Loy Henderson Memo, July 31, 1945, in *RDOS-SA, 1945-1949*, US-National Archives.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Secretary of State (Stettinius) to Eddy, April 18, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII p.877. Of the \$16 million thought necessary for Saudi needs the 'supply' portion would cost \$13 million. In order for Britain to provide half of that it would need to contribute 1,652,000, sterling pounds. This was just 375,000 pounds more than her original figure of 1,250,000 pounds. Washington thought that London should not make an issue over that amount of extra funds. See State Department to British Embassy, April 25, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 882-884.



more aid in the form of cultural projects or road construction but in regard to the joint aid programme London held firm.<sup>122</sup>

Realising that haggling with the British would delay matters further, Joseph Grew arranged for alternative means, independent of the joint supply programme, to channel assistance to the King.<sup>123</sup> Grew approached the Foreign Economic Administration to make plans to fund Ibn Saud entirely in case the British pulled out of the 1945 joint subsidy programme altogether.<sup>124</sup> But officials at State were anxious for the British to agree to an increase in the supply programme. The situation was becoming serious. Food shortages in Saudi Arabia had been exacerbated by locust plagues and drought. The American Minister in Jeddah was inundated with requests for additional cereals and other foodstuffs to compensate for the losses.<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, the King complained that he had heard nothing about the amount of aid that would be given for 1945 or for 1946. Plans for improvements in irrigation, water supply to the cities, transport services electricity and other services were on the cards but needed development loans – the type supplied by the Export-Import Bank. Further delays might force Ibn Saud to ‘bleed’ ARAMCO for money to stabilise his regime. Eddy warned that given recent events the King could not help but wonder if “the machinery of [the] American government will permit long range commitments to Saudi Arabia” and this was harmful to the prestige and interests of the United States.<sup>126</sup>

Grew could not offer any answer except to urge the King to be patient. The long range financial assistance programme of the type desired by Ibn Saud was “without precedent in United States history” and it was

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<sup>122</sup> British Ambassador to Secretary of State, May 16, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p. 895.

<sup>123</sup> Reports from Jeddah were that Ibn Saud was incredibly upset over the delays in aid reaching him. Eddy to Secretary of State, April 20, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p. 878.

<sup>124</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Foreign Economic Administrator (Crawley), February 14, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 850-851. See also Grew to Crawley, March 23, 1945, p. 866, *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, June 21, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 911-913.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

necessary to find creative ways to finance the endeavour.<sup>127</sup> The timetable for aid was uncertain. Congress was not due to have hearings on foreign aid until the middle of June and approval would take weeks after that to filter through. All that could be done was to assure the King that the United States was taking strong interest in his welfare and the stability of his country. Grew hoped that at least the Dhahran airfield project and accompanying Army mission would provide certain tangible benefits on the ground.

Meanwhile new developments in the war, brought changes to American priorities on the ground and the alteration to the War Department's troop re-deployment plans. Instead of transferring forces from the European theatre to the Pacific via the Dahran base in Saudi Arabia, they would be routed through the United States. Suddenly, the immediate need of a Saudi base of operations was called into question. It also appeared that, due to the rapid pace of the war, the Dhahran airfield might not be finished in time to be of much use. The War Department now realised that the expenditure of funds for the construction of an airfield in Dhahran on the basis of military necessity "would be of doubtful legal validity".<sup>128</sup>

The Secretary of War however, was willing to go ahead with the construction of the airfield if it was deemed to be in the national interest—which would require Presidential authorisation. Again for this crucial decision Stettinius was not in town and Grew was Acting Secretary of State. A methodical man, Grew was not apt to make recommendations without consulting experts. This gave great weight to the arguments of the NEA.<sup>129</sup> Grew would only ask Truman for approval after thoroughly checking with the Department's specialists. In a memo to the President dated June 25, 1945, Grew pointed out that:

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<sup>127</sup> Acting Secretary of State, (Grew) to Eddy, June 18, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 908-910.

<sup>128</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Eddy, June 25, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p.915.

<sup>129</sup> Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p. 235.



The Saudi Arabian oil fields, which promise to be among the most valuable in the world, are now under concession to an American company. The continuance of that concession in American hands holds the out the best prospect that the oil of Saudi Arabia will be developed commercially with the greatest rapidity and upon the largest scale, producing revenues which will contribute to the betterment of the economic condition in Saudi Arabia, and in consequence, to its political stability..... The immediate construction by this country of an airfield at Dhahran, to be used for military purposes initially but destined for an ultimate civil utilization, would be a strong showing of American interest.<sup>130</sup>

As it happened, the matter would have been Grew's decision anyway since the day after this recommendation was put to the President, Edward Stettinius resigned as Secretary of State. Within twenty four hours Presidential authorisation for the building of the Dhahran airfield was granted.<sup>131</sup> Subsequently the State Department received news that the Export-Import Bank had approved a loan to Saudi Arabia—"provided adequate security for repayment could be made".<sup>132</sup>

### Britain and the Emergence of a New American Policy

Though the State Department believed that an increased American presence in Saudi Arabia added stability, for Ibn Saud the growing relationship with America was causing problems. Hashemite propaganda emanating from Transjordan and Iraq accused the Saudi ruler of 'selling out' to Europe and America. Internally, Muwahhidun hard-liners were

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<sup>130</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to President Truman, June 26, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p.915-917.

<sup>131</sup> Truman gave his approval in a memo directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. See President Truman to Admiral Leahy, Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 28, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, fn 43, p.917. Edward Stettinius resigned as Secretary of State on June 27, 1945.

<sup>132</sup> The difficulty lay in the fact that world currencies were not easily convertible at that time and the majority of countries which purchased Saudi oil did so in sterling pounds or other currencies. The oil company estimated that after it had met other dollar expenditures such as salaries of employees, U.S income taxes, and the purchase of equipment, it would not make enough dollar exchange from the sale of Saudi oil to provide Ibn Saud with enough dollars to meet the repayments of the loan. Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Eddy, June 27, 1945 *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 917-918.

becoming increasingly vocal about their opposition to the influx of foreign goods and personnel. Previously the King had managed to neutralise his detractors through a combination of subsidies for tribal leaders, gifts of food and clothes and the use of house arrest for persistent critics. His ability to maintain those policies had been seriously hampered by the delays in the aid and supply programmes placing him in an uncomfortable situation.

Thus when the State Department came up with a plan to dispatch a U.S. Army military mission to Saudi Arabia the King was cautious. He certainly needed aid but with each shipment came potential criticism and it seemed only prudent to accept the aid he needed most. Meanwhile, the State Department was anxious, in light of delays in other aid programmes, to save face and send something to the King. The Army had drawn up plans to train pilots, ground crews, and technicians and provide medical services at different locations around Saudi Arabia. Since it would be a military operation no prior Congressional approval would be required and the Saudi Government could gain access to materials that were restricted by war-time rationing.<sup>133</sup>

However, when the American Minister went to finalise these arrangements, he found that the King was not interested in the offer. Ibn Saud listed three reasons for declining to accept the mission. The first was due to the criticism by "fanatical reactionary subjects" who opposed any foreign presence and would only be further inspired against the King. Second, Ibn Saud wanted to deflect accusations made in the Arab press that he was a puppet of the non-believers and under foreign military occupation. Third, was the possible objection by the British.<sup>134</sup> Eddy

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<sup>133</sup> Ibn Saud wanted to know if the building of the Dhahran airfield was contingent on his acceptance of the military mission. When he was reassured that the United States was providing services which it believed Saudi Arabia sought and that there was no compulsion to accept the military mission, the king declined. Report of Eddy meeting with Ibn Saud in Vice Consul Dhahran, (Sands) to Secretary of State, July 4, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 920.

<sup>134</sup> Vice Consul Dhahran, (Sands) to Secretary of State, July 4, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 920. Sands was conveying the content of Eddy's discussions with the King. Ibn Saud was



suspected that the refusal of the military mission was also a sign that the King was reluctant to break away from Britain's hold on him and was a by product of America's tarnished image. The Minister reported that "the King seems to be reverting to the belief that, however powerful and friendly the United States may be, Britain continues to dominate the Middle East".<sup>135</sup>

News of the King's refusal was received with incredulity at the State Department: "The King has for over 2 years pressed this Govt. to have US Army provide services that he now rejects".<sup>136</sup> Especially frustrating was Ibn Saud's seeming failure to understand the importance of the Army mission. The Army was the only branch of the U.S. Government capable of acting independently and, in this case, without cost to the King. The mission would have set up a number of infrastructure projects to provide vital services to the people and bolster the King's transport and communications capability. It was also a necessary component of the Dhahran airfield project. Cancellation of the mission could set back plans for the airfield as well as delay the building of necessary infrastructure such as roads, services and utilities.

The King would still be reliant on foreign aid and under the influence of outside powers. Again there was distinct anti-British sentiment in the State Department and concern that even if further assistance was given to Ibn Saud, Britain would reap the benefit: "the US Govt. might build an airfield in the center of great American oil reserves only to find it controlled and operated by some nation other than Saudi Arabia".<sup>137</sup> It seemed clear that the King's reaction to the American proposal was "a reversal of policy that apparently can be explained only in terms of British

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concerned about the repercussions of having military personnel moving about the country. There was not so much worry about the Dhahran airfield because the personnel would be confined to a small area around the base and be far way from the Holy cities.

<sup>135</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, July 8, 1945 *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 923-926.

<sup>136</sup> Frustration among senior officials at State was apparent in the correspondence. See Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Eddy, July 13, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp.928-929.

<sup>137</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Grew) to Eddy, July 13, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp.928-929.

pressure".<sup>138</sup> London was viewed as opposing any American activity in Saudi Arabia which gave even the appearance of political or military superiority. Eddy confirmed this on the ground: "I am convinced [the] British do not want [the] United States to build [a] Saudi army or air force, preferring themselves to 'rescue the land' if disorder arose as they have rescued Syria and Lebanon".<sup>139</sup>

Eddy felt strongly that the United States should deal with Ibn Saud on its own terms without British strings attached: "I hope we never join in joint subsidy or supply again".<sup>140</sup> However, he was to be disappointed. In an eleventh hour move the British caved in and the Foreign Office agreed to settle the joint supply programme. A combined figure of \$10 million was put forward with the British contribution being £2.5 million pounds (the equivalent of \$5 million).<sup>141</sup>

The finalising of the subsidy programme did not reduce State Department worries. Still smarting from the King's refusal over the military mission, officials did not want to lose more ground and rushed to conclude negotiations on the Dhahran airfield. On August 5, General Benjamin Giles, Commander of the USAFME, flew to Saudi Arabia to finalise the agreement. This time he was received by the King and the American Minister with great ceremony. At the negotiating table matters were complicated by the American desire for a long lease, which the King was reluctant to give. Failing that, Giles sought access for American commercial

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> The British had also been reluctant to approve American civil aviation to use Saudi facilities and also had been less than helpful when the US wanted to install direct communication cables to Washington. Eddy to Secretary of State, July 14, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 929-930.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Since the State Department did not think that \$10million was enough for Ibn Saud it organised a separate supplemental supply program worth \$6 million. Part of this would be made up by minting 10 million riyals for the Saudi Government (equivalent to \$1.4 million). Another \$1.6 million would be sent in further supplies, including: 287 Trucks-valued at \$1,400,000; Radio equipment-\$134,000; Farm equipment-\$37,000; Distillation Plant- \$34,000; Garage equip.-\$30,000; Writing paper-\$7,500; Passenger cars-\$5,000. A further \$3 million would be sent in silver riyal coins. Secretary of State to Eddy, July 4 and July 5, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 918-922. Also Secretary of State (Grew ) to Eddy July 16,



carriers with special access rights and rates, to use the airport after the war. As an incentive the Army would build a hospital, a road from Dhahran to Riyadh over 350 miles of the toughest dessert terrain—all without charge. Giles thought it was "a neat little gift which would especially delight the king" and assumed it would be an offer the king could not refuse.<sup>142</sup>

However, during the negotiations Ibn Saud was not as impressed as the General had hoped and was more concerned with the appearance of retaining his sovereignty and jurisdiction. While he agreed to the construction of the base he insisted that it would remain the property of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that the Saudi flag should fly over the airfield, as well as over any inland posts, emergency landing fields, and stations where navigational equipment was set up. Ibn Saud himself admitted that the presence of the flags would camouflage the American presence at the sites and reduce the likelihood of Bedouin or Ikhwan attacks on the 'the King's property'.<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, the King made the stipulation that only civilian personnel could be allowed to build the three projects and that the men who constructed the airport should not be in uniform. General Giles was amazed at the request as all of the Army engineers, technicians and workmen who would be involved in the construction were in uniform. It was not possible to demobilise and convert them into civilians while a war was on, just to build what was in fact an army project. The King however, insisted and Giles could not convince him otherwise. Even a request from Washington did no good. Giles had no choice but to leave in frustration without resolving the issue. The King maintained his position and did not

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1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 930-931 and Secretary of State to U.S. Ambassador in London, August 8, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp.940-941.

<sup>142</sup> Memorandum on "U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia" May 15 1946, by Nils E. Lind, Attache, Legation Jeddah, RG59/250/49/32/7, Lot File 57/D/298, Box 10, RDOS/RONEA 1941-1961 USNA. The discussions surrounding the Dhahran agreement are covered in some detail in the memo. Lind was Eddy's subordinate deputy at the Legation.

<sup>143</sup> Eddy to Secretary of State, August 8, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp.943-945.

understand why the army workers could not simply take off their uniforms during the construction period.

In the meantime, the war with Japan ended, putting to rest the problem of finding civilian workmen. In fact the question arose again as to whether the military should still continue with the building projects. The War Department decided to go ahead, but only with the airfield, not the road or the hospital. In a final round of discussions conducted by Minister Eddy an agreement was reached that provided the United States Government operational control of the airfield for up to three years. Following this period, administrative control would be handed to the Saudi Government, with the proviso—which the Joint Chiefs had insisted upon—that the Saudis could not turn over the field to a third power.<sup>144</sup> Eddy had expected there to be specific prohibitions placed on the conduct of Christian worship, but the King did not bring up the subject.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, the Minister felt that the whole episode had harmed United States prestige.

The end of negotiations marked the first official U.S. Government project on the ground in Saudi Arabia and the beginning of a long relationship of military co-operation. It provided the State Department with relief as it was an indication of American commitment to the country and because it established a channel for aid as the presence of an American installation in the country made all the difference when soliciting aid from Congress. The Dhahran airfield agreement came at a time when priorities were beginning to shift in Washington. The end of the war in Europe was approaching and the justification for funding Saudi Arabia would become more difficult. The Lend Lease programme itself was slated to expire in

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<sup>144</sup> One of the immediate effects of the deal was the influx of over 3,500 foreign workers to build the field. This included 1500 Italians, 500 Iraqis and Iranians, 1000 Yemenis, 25 Egyptians and 500 Americans. It would be the first time that such large numbers of foreigners entered the country and Ibn Saud kept them far away from major cities to avoid inciting criticism from the Ikhwan and other conservative elements.

<sup>145</sup> However, the King was concerned that American servicemen not abuse a provision for personal recreation as an excuse to import prostitutes, Eddy to Secretary of State, August 8, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp.943-945.



December 1945. Existing State Department methods of letter writing and playing up America's anti-colonial reputation were deemed "hopelessly inadequate".<sup>146</sup>

Moreover, there was a feeling that it was unrealistic to continue to rely on Congressional appropriations when in many circumstances it would be "embarrassing and difficult to justify publicly". A case in point was the reluctance to admit publicly that the United States was proposing to grant a large aid package to a relatively insignificant Middle Eastern country which played no active role in the war effort. Nevertheless, while officials at the NEA worked behind the scenes to formulate legislative bills and negotiate Export Import Bank loans, the Saudi Government faced crises with no indication of when relief was expected.<sup>147</sup> Yet at the same time there was a growing concern over the ascendancy on the Soviet Union and fears of communist expansion in the Middle East.

### The Spectre of Communism

Many senior officials at the State Department and within the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, had long held strong anti-Communist views.<sup>148</sup> As an Allied victory became assured the expansion of Soviet forces caused great concern among officials such as Joseph Grew, Gordon Merriam, Loy Henderson, and Wallace Murray. There was a general belief among these officials that American interests were noble and free from the taint of colonial domination and that the United States had to assert itself and play a more active role in raising the economic and social conditions of the

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<sup>146</sup> Under Secretary of State (Acheson) to Secretary of State, Oct. 9, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, pp.43-44

<sup>147</sup> One of the main delays in the latter had been the lack of dollars to meet repayments. This was due to Saudi oil primarily being sold in countries where payments were made in sterling pounds or other currencies. A world wide shortage in dollars and lack of convertibility between currencies meant that regardless of how much oil Saudi Arabia sold, it would not be able to meet dollar requirements to pay off interest, let alone the principle, of any loan. This fact made American bankers reluctant to approve loans to Ibn Saud.

<sup>148</sup> See Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; Stephen Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, New York: Penguin, 1993.

peoples of the Middle East in order to ensure that the natural resources of the region remained "in the hands of people following the paths of democratic civilisation rather than those of Eastern dictatorships".<sup>149</sup>

The head of NEA, Loy Henderson was particularly keen to employ a more dynamic policy in the Middle East. His only experience was in Iraq but he brought his concerns about Soviet expansion into the department. Many of his colleagues at the European desk, including Acheson, were not initially interested in the Middle East. However, there was a strong ally in Joseph Grew. Both men shared anti-Communist sentiments and believed that the Soviets would not give up control over Eastern Europe, but were seeking to encroach into the Near and Far East.<sup>150</sup>

The State Department policy, according to the NEA, was that the United States should assist countries in the region to improve economically and create a higher standard of living for local people and to encourage trade and foster democratic ideals. Barriers to trade should be reduced and an orderly development of resources should be encouraged without discrimination and restriction. Yet throughout the Middle East the State Department could see that democracy and free enterprise was under threat from the authoritarian regime of the Soviet Union. According to one report:

The policy of the Soviet Unions in the Middle East appears to possess two direct objectives; achievement of security along its Middle East frontiers and the prevention of a coalition of the capitalist countries in the Middle East against the Soviet Union. An indirect policy of the Union may be the extension of its social and economic systems throughout the Middle East. Consequently, the area is a fertile field for friction and activities which may threaten Middle East security and world peace.<sup>151</sup>

With the war in Europe over there was no need to continue to provide aid to the Soviet Army. President Truman signed an executive order that

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<sup>149</sup> NEA Memorandum prepared for President Truman, no date, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 45-48.

<sup>150</sup> See Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, p. 237 and p.241

<sup>151</sup> Report by the Coordinating Committee of the Department of State, May 2, 1945  
*American Economic Policy in the Middle East*, in "Aspects Department of State Thinking on



ended all aid shipments to Russia.<sup>152</sup> However, this led to concerns that Russia might be encouraged to move into the Middle East.<sup>153</sup> One reason was the fact that over 40,000 soldiers of the Red Army were already occupying northern Iran—originally this had been part of a wartime Anglo-Russian bid to neutralise an Iranian government with pro-German sympathies and also to secure Soviet supply lines.<sup>154</sup> The measure was supposed to be temporary, but as the war went on and Anglo-Russian relations deteriorated the intentions of Soviet troops became suspect.<sup>155</sup> Poised near the frontiers of the Persian Gulf, Soviet intervention in the greater Middle East seemed entirely possible. It had been acknowledged as early as 1944 that:

the Russians would like to expand their influence and gain some sort of long-term foothold, through the concession of a free port or by some other means, upon the shores of the Persian Gulf. This, of course, would place the Russians within a very short distance not only of the oil fields in southern Iran, Iraq and Kuwait, but also of those in Bahrein and eastern Saudi Arabia.<sup>156</sup>

Russia could also threaten British lines of communication to the Gulf emirates and to India. Moreover, it was likely that Russia would use any signs of unrest in the Gulf as an excuse for intervention. Economic crises

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Political and Economic Policies of the United States in the Near and Middle East for the Postwar Period", FRUS 1945:VIII, p. 33-48.

<sup>152</sup> Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, pp.62-63. On May 8 1945, President Truman ordered that aid to the Soviet Union be suspended.

<sup>153</sup> Rubin, *Secrets of State: The State Department and the Struggle Over U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp.42-43.

<sup>154</sup> On August 25, 1941 in a combined effort 40,000 Soviet troops entered Iran from the north and 19,000 British soldiers entered from the south. The occupation was designed to prevent Axis forces from achieving control of Iranian oil fields and the world's largest refinery at Abadan. See Kuniholm, *Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, pp.140-148.

<sup>155</sup> Moscow embroiled itself in Iranian politics and had close links with the Iranian Communist Party (Tudeh). Soviet attempts to influence domestic policies and support for the nationalisation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company concerned Britain. Russian pressure was so intense that at one point the Prime Minister of Iran resigned. See dispatches from the American Ambassador, Tehran to Secretary of State, November 1, 1944, FRUS 1944:V, pp. 464-465 and Memo by Secretary of State (Stettinius) to President Roosevelt, December 6, 1944, FRUS 1944:V, pp. 482-483. For more on Anglo-Russian tension in Iran see Rubin, *Great Powers in the Middle East*, pp. 73-109 and Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 298-299.

<sup>156</sup> Murray to Stettinius October, 27, 1944, FRUS 1944: V, pp.624-626.

erupting in Saudi Arabia followed by domestic unrest posed "a danger that either Great Britain or Soviet Russia would attempt to move into Saudi Arabia to preserve order and thus prevent the other from doing so".<sup>157</sup> America already had "heavy commitments" elsewhere but the British were well established in the Middle East. There were over 20,000 British troops in the Suez Canal Zone fully equipped for war. Furthermore, Britain had military installations and naval facilities throughout the area in Khartoum, Haifa, Transjordan, Iraq, Bahrain and Aden.<sup>158</sup> The war strengthened the British desire to retain her power in the Middle East. The region was a vital link between parts of her empire and it was an area where British interests were directly affected by Russian activities. The Soviet Union might see British positions in Iran, Turkey and Greece as a threat and therefore be mobilised to act in 'defence'.<sup>159</sup> It became more feasible if Britain retained her position in the area and Washington maintained primary military responsibility of Middle East security under Britain.

While recognising the need to maintain Britain's position in the area, it was clear that the United States would have to encourage Anglo-American collaboration over economic interests and minimise excessive competition. American officials believed that British could not implement her economic policy without American help and that London knew this fact.<sup>160</sup> Britain too, understood that she could not face a major war in the Middle East without American assistance. Both countries recognised the need to strengthen the Saudi Government:

A strong and independent Saudi Arabian Government in the Near East, where two great world powers come into contact, is less likely to fall victim to war breeding aggression than a

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<sup>157</sup> Wallace Murray to Dean Acheson, January 27, 1945, RDOS-SA, T1179, US-National Archives.

<sup>158</sup> Ovendal, Ritchie, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-1962* London: Leicester University Press, 1996, pp. 2-3.

<sup>159</sup> Orde, *The Eclipse of Great Britain: The United States and British Imperial Decline*, p. 163.

<sup>160</sup> State Department Memo *British and American Positions in the "Pentagon Talks of 1947"* Between the U.S. and U.K. Concerning the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, *FRUS* 1947:V, p.516.



week and disintegrating state vulnerable to economical and political penetration.<sup>161</sup>

It was for this purpose that NEA deputy chief, Gordon Merriam proposed that Congress create a special fund with an annual budget of \$100 million, to be used at the discretion of the President, for the "purpose of furthering the political and strategic interests of the United States in the Middle East".<sup>162</sup> The fund would be used to make loans and subsidies on a non-commercial basis—to Middle East countries to develop infrastructure and socio-economic standards. This was essentially similar to the pre-war British policy of providing grants and subsidies to Middle East rulers to engender loyalty. In this case the intention was to prevent Soviet inroads and prop up weak potentates.<sup>163</sup>

While a worthy plan, it was doubtful that Congress, already reluctant to commit resources abroad, would give approval. With the war coming to a conclusion there would be little enthusiasm to provide up to \$100 million annually for the expenses of a foreign government. Even the Lend Lease Bill itself had taken the forceful personality and wartime pressure of President Roosevelt to be passed through the legislature. Lend Lease was scheduled to be terminated the day after the Japanese surrender. Truman was unlikely to take on the Congress and was viewed as being incapable of such a task.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Wallace Murray to Dean Acheson, January 27, 1945, RDOS-SA, T1179, US-National Archives. Murray summarised for Acheson the importance of Saudi Arabia to the United States. Acheson was to use the information to lobby Congressmen for their support of State Department measures to grant post-war aid for Ibn Saud.

<sup>162</sup> Under Secretary of State (Acheson) to Secretary of State, Oct. 9, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, pp.43-44

<sup>163</sup> There were fears that the Soviet Union could, within a few years, re-enter the world stage and become a serious challenger to the United States. A State Department report of July 1945 claimed: "the potential of the Soviet system in world trade is actually great and could slay us in Middle East markets and world markets generally". Report entitled *American Economic Policy in the Middle East*, prepared by A.B. Calder, July 14, 1945, RONEA-DOS, Subject File 1941-1951, Lot File 57 D298, Box 6, US-National Archives. Calder was former 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and then later posted to Cairo. Concern over Soviet expansion is also articulated in a memo by Loy Henderson to Acheson, Dunn, Hickerson, FRUS 1946:VII, pp.1-6.

<sup>164</sup> Within the State Department there were concerns that Truman's lack of experience in foreign affairs would hamper his ability to conduct an effective foreign policy. See Under-

However, with encouragement from Dean Acheson and Joseph Grew, Truman did take the bold step of granting an extension of Lend Lease to Saudi Arabia. In an unprecedented move Truman signed a special Presidential order which exempted the Kingdom from the termination conditions of the Lend Lease Bill and allowed the War Department to provide Saudi Arabia with both military and civilian supplies without Congressional scrutiny.<sup>165</sup> At the same time, the State Department's Division of Financial Affairs also came up with additional funds for Ibn Saud. They proudly informed the NEA that with some creative thinking they had formulated a plan for a development loan of \$25 million distributed over a five year period and which could be repaid out of future oil royalties.<sup>166</sup> With American aid in hand and royalties from oil flowing, Ibn Saud's financial crises had ended.

It could be said that Truman's extension of lend lease for the sole benefit of Saudi Arabia was highly ironic—given that the rest of the nations that had sacrificed much for the Allied war effort were suddenly cut off. Saudi Arabia was not a democracy nor had it contributed troops to the war effort nor faced Axis armies. However, this was indicative of the growing importance placed on Saudi Arabia in light of the emerging threat from Soviet Russia and the beginning of the Cold War.

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Secretary of State (Acheson) to Chief of NEA (Merriam), October 18, 1945, RONEA-DOS, Subject File 1941-1951, Lot File 57 D298, Box 6, US-National Archives. Charles Bohlen, Head of the Division of Eastern European Affairs at the State Department (and later Ambassador to the Soviet Union) also shared this view. See Bohlen, Charles. *Witness to History*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp.211-212. See also Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 548-549

<sup>165</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Acheson) to Eddy, September 11, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, p. 952. See also Secretary of State (Byrnes) to Secretary of Treasury (Vinson) October 22, 1945 RDOS T1179/R3; Baram, *The Department of State in the Middle East*, p.236

<sup>166</sup> Financial Affairs official estimated that in the period 1946-1950 the Saudi government would need \$25 million after which it time it would be able to balance its budget. In the small print it was specified that at least \$20 million had to be spent on the purchase of American goods and the remainder on development projects. So Ibn Saud would not have free control of his expenditure. See Director of Office of Financial and Development Policy (Collado) to President of Export-Import Bank (Taylor), October 19, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, pp. 960-963. See also Memo of conversation between members of NEA, Financial



### Prelude to the Cold War

In the period following the end of the war the focus of the United States shifted away from the British presence in Arabia to peace making on two continents; the administration of Japan and Germany. This was hampered by the fact that Truman's policies were slow to develop and the new President lacked the confidence and the experience of his predecessor to develop his own policies. Roosevelt had controlled policy himself while the State Department's influence "remained limited".<sup>167</sup> Truman tried to maintain Roosevelt's old policies without perhaps fully understanding how they had been intended to work, nor could he employ the same divide and rule tactics to get results from his subordinates. Although his predecessor had been able to pit one cabinet member against another, in the case of Ickes and Hull for example, this was not Truman's style.

Moreover, Truman did not enhance his ability to form coherent policy when he selected James F. Byrnes as Secretary of State. A former judge who had served a brief term in the House of Representatives Byrnes had no experience in foreign affairs. Neither it seems did he have much patience for lessons in international affairs from his State Department advisors. Byrnes spent most of the first six months in office outside Washington. When he did come to foreign policy meetings, Byrnes was frequently unprepared and chose his own 'shoot from the hip' strategy. The long absences and private decision making process alienated senior officials and "produced disorientation and dissension" in the State Department.<sup>168</sup>

Changes were also occurring in Britain with the election of a new labour Government and Clement Attlee as Prime Minister. With the death of Roosevelt and the defeat of Churchill the personal diplomacy that had

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Affairs Division and officers from British Embassy, Washington, November 30, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, pp. 973-974.

<sup>167</sup> Rubin, *Secrets of State*, p.33.

<sup>168</sup> Byrnes was appointed on July 3 1945; Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War*, pp.88-89.

characterized Anglo-American relations had come to an end.<sup>169</sup> The new government found two groups in the American administration: "the first ignores us altogether or regards us as a hindrance to American interest. The second accepts us as a valuable junior partner in an Anglo-American concern".<sup>170</sup> Britain was also in a considerably weaker economic situation. In fact London was seeking a massive financial aid package of \$4.4 billion from the United States.

Prime Minister Attlee was more concerned in resolving domestic economic crises than enforcing British dominance in Saudi Arabia. The Foreign Office resolved to inform Ibn Saud that as far as His Majesty's Government was concerned he "should make arrangements to secure all supplies for 1946, through commercial channels".<sup>171</sup> There was little interest in engaging in another joint subsidy programme with the United States:

The chaos in Saudi Arabian Government finances, indeed, defies description.....After years of British (later Anglo-American) subsidy, and of unfailingly generous accommodation by the American Oil Company and the United States Government in the matter of advances and credits, the Government is, if not pauperised, completely demoralised, and no flickering sense of financial responsibility remains.<sup>172</sup>

Ironically, in the immediate post war period Italy, Germany and France had been removed from the scene and as such Britain was unchallenged in the Middle East (the exception being the American presence in Saudi Arabia). Yet Britain's own weakness meant that her presence was

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<sup>169</sup> Attlee disliked the limelight and did not have the flamboyant personality of Churchill. He preferred to work by committee rather than take direct charge himself. See Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War*, p.82

<sup>170</sup> Balfour to SOSFA, August 18, 1945, FO AN 2505/4/5, cited in Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War*, p. 88

<sup>171</sup> British Embassy to State Department, November 21, 1945, FRUS 1945:VIII, pp. 969-969.

<sup>172</sup> Grafftey-Smith to Bevin 'Annual Report on Saudi Arabia 1946', February 5, 1947, in FO 371/60295B E1095/1095/25. Oil royalties for 1946 were to be \$8 million while for 1947 they were estimated at \$14 million. Also had taken from ARAMCO \$11 million in advances from royalties. At the same time the Saudi Government owed \$2 million for surplus War Department material supplied on 5 years credit.



somewhat hollow. In fact after the independence of India in 1947 the whole *raison d'être* for British defence of strategic routes in Middle East would end. Egypt and Iraq were independent polities and the one remaining issue in the Middle East was the question of Palestine. It was here that the role of Ibn Saud could be useful but both the Labour Government in Britain and the Truman administration differed with Ibn Saud on that issue.

With Truman still developing his own 'doctrine' the Joint Chiefs and military strategists were looking at the Middle East in light of the activities of the Soviet Union.<sup>173</sup> The Joint Chiefs increasingly saw Saudi Arabia as part of a buffer zone between Russia and the British Mediterranean: "If the peoples of the Middle East turn to Russia, this would have the same impact in many respects as would military conquest of this area by the Soviets".<sup>174</sup> Within this zone existed the oil reserves of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The Joint Chiefs classified them as "absolutely vital" to the security of the United States and were determined that if the Soviets made any move to deny America access to these reserves to ensure they did not succeed.<sup>175</sup>

Scholars such as Rubin have argued that after the war the United States did not want British assistance in supporting the Saudi government.<sup>176</sup> Yet Washington was keen on British involvement—but under American leadership. Britain's historic attitude had been extremely protective of her position in the Gulf, and with an economy weakened by war and reliant on American assistance, Britain had to give Washington the upper hand, in order to retain its position there.

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<sup>173</sup> The military was also looking into wholesale conversion of energy sources from coal to oil which made Saudi reserves of great importance. Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-1962*, London: Leicester University Press, 1996, p.27. See also *FRUS* 1947:III, pp. 485-514

<sup>174</sup> Memo from JCS to the State, War, Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), June 21, 1946, *FRUS* 1946:VII, pp. 631-633. This committee was created in December 1944 to provide the State Department with advice on political and military affairs from other departments, which would be helpful in the development of foreign policy. The records of the SWNCC can be found in RDOS, RG 353, Microfilm reference M1195 at the US-National Archives in Washington D.C.

<sup>175</sup> SWNCC memo, October 12, 1946, *FRUS* 1946:VII, pp. 529-532. See also Henderson to Acheson, October 8, 1946, *FRUS* 1946:VII, pp. 523-525. Henderson was conveying to Acheson at State the views of the Joint Chiefs.

<sup>176</sup> Rubin, *The Great Powers in the Middle East*, p.66.

With this new power dynamic, Anglo-American policy focused increasingly on the threat posed by Soviet expansion.<sup>177</sup> The world entered an era where Cold War American interests worked to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining a foothold in the oil rich Arabian peninsula and provide Saudi Arabia with the financial and security guarantees that would ensure the legacy of the Al-Saud family dynasty.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> State Department Memo *British and American Positions in the "Pentagon Talks of 1947"* Between the U.S. and U.K. Concerning the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, *FRUS* 1947:V, pp.511-521. Washington's primary concern was focusing on the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was seen more in light of the explanations of George F. Kennan who in his famous long telegram of 22 February 1946 analysed Soviet policy as one which the United States could not cooperate. Russian motivations and Soviet paranoia about security and ideological expansion would preclude cooperation. See George F. Kennan, *Memoirs*, 1925-1950, Boston: 1960, pp. 583-598.

<sup>178</sup> Memo Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Murray) to Secretary of State, December 19, 1944, *FRUS* 1944:V, pp. 485-486.



## Conclusion

Abdul Aziz Al-Saud is a remarkable figure in the history of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite his beginnings as the ruler of a seemingly insignificant desert polity he rose to international attention and was courted by the great powers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Britain, Russia, Turkey and the United States, to name a few. All the time he successfully navigated his fledgling polity into the modern world maintaining his power through political expediency and the manipulation of religious and ideological symbols, thus maintaining a link between faith and loyalty to the state and limiting the extent that the message of social and religious reform interfered with his burgeoning political power.

In the wake of such feats descriptions of this man have ranged from a brilliant, charismatic leader who conquered Arabia in the name of Islam with his fiery band of Ikhwan warriors to romanticised depictions of a simple ruler who managed his realm using a money chest stored under the bed of his minister of finance.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has attempted to separate the myth of Ibn Saud from the reality and to correct previously held misconceptions about his outlook and motives. For example, it has been clearly shown in the course of this work that the challenges of maintaining his rule, supplying his soldiers, granting largesse to his supporters and extended family meant that the thrust of Saudi expansion was often less to do with ideological Wahhabism than with the practical need for political and economic security.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984, p. 176. Khalid bin Sayeed referred to policies of Abdul Aziz as "shrewd and unsentimental". See Khalid bin Sayeed, *Western Dominance and Political Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p.78.

<sup>2</sup> In 1941 for example Ibn Saud was providing a direct subsidy to over half a million people and was feeding thirty thousand on a daily basis. The subsidies were a form of largesse to tribal chiefs, beduins and others. Hundreds came to the Ibn Saud's quarters in Riyadh alone

Equally important in the development in Saudi strategy was the primary role played by the Kuwaiti ruler Mubarak Al-Sabah. Mubarak nurtured the young Abdul Aziz and gave political and economic support for the conquest of Najd. In fact, the less than glamorous reality is that the Al-Saud began the twentieth century as pawns in a larger political chess game between Kuwait, the British Indian Government and the Ottoman Porte. Although Abdul Aziz later emerged from the shadow of his Kuwaiti mentor and successfully employed the latter's strategy of encouraging conflict and confusion between the great powers. Like Mubarak, Abdul Aziz took advantage of the insecurities and bureaucratic infighting among Ottoman, British and American governments departments.

Previous scholarship has underestimated just how early Ibn Saud established treaty relations with the Porte and the degree to which British intelligence had gained knowledge of his activities. Ibn Saud's gregarious and generous nature allowed him to cast a memorable impression on British officials whom he wished to charm. Shakespeare, Philby, Dickson, and at times Cox, were full of praise for the Najdi ruler.<sup>3</sup> It has been shown the degree to which Ibn Saud was able to manipulate these otherwise intelligent and manipulative individuals. Despite several authors noting the closeness of Captain Shakespeare to the Najdi ruler, the British Agent had so completely misread Ibn Saud that at one point he confidently assured his superiors that the Najdi ruler had no intentions to expand his realm whatsoever.<sup>4</sup> It was the minority voices of figures like John Keyes, who had little contact with the

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for their daily meals. See Memorandum on Saudi Arabia, October 28, 1941, Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Saudi Arabia, 1930-1944, Microfilm #T1179, Reel 3, US-National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> The Political Agent, Bahrain, Harold Dickson, declared that Ibn Saud was "without rival throughout Arabia.....His bluff, candid and open-hearted manner serve to act as cover for one of the astutest brains that can be found." See Report of Political Agent, Bahrain August 12, 1920 (H.R.P. Dickson) IOR L/P&S/10/936/B349.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare to Hirtzel, June 27, 1914, PRO FO 371/2124/28966.



ruler, that had the more sceptical and realistic assessments of Ibn Saud and his intentions.

As demonstrated in this thesis, British policy during the First World War was divided by the tensions between officials in Cairo, Delhi, and London. Much of the literature regarding this period focuses on the years following the outbreak of the First World War. Even Philby, who has written much on Saudi Arabia, does not delve deeply into the pre-war tensions between Ibn Saud, the Porte and Britain.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Shakespeare first established his links with Ibn Saud in late 1913 is overshadowed by the attention given to the period after Britain declared war on the Porte in November 1914.<sup>6</sup>

Previous writers, such as Jacob Goldberg, have noted with surprise that a Muslim ruler could forsake the support of the Ottoman Sultan and instead turn to Britain, the colonial conqueror of Muslim India. In fact, the focus of Wahhabi doctrine was the internal enemy of Islam—the *mushrikeen*, (those who had turned away from the 'true Islam'). It was the mission of the Wahhabi movement to reverse the rise of so called 'deviant' practices and innovations in religious life. This enabled Ibn Saud to focus the Ikhwan on fellow tribesmen in the Arabian interior.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis has also examined the origins of the Ikhwan and questioned the common assumption that Abdul Aziz was entirely responsible for founding the movement himself. Moreover, it has questioned the assumption that the Ikhwan rebellion of 1929 was caused by the curtailment of their religious mission to fight the 'infidel' because of Britain's warning to Ibn Saud

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<sup>5</sup> Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp. 270-272, See Kostiner, *MOSA*, which, for example, focuses on the 1916-1936 period

<sup>6</sup> The Declaration of War, signed by King George on November 5, 1914, can be found in PRO 371/2145. The political background leading up to Britain's declaration of war on the Porte has been discussed elsewhere. See Adelson, Roger. 'The Formation of British Policy Towards the Middle East 1914-1918', Ph.D. thesis, Washington University, 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia*, pp.40-41.

not to attack the mandates of Iraq and Transjordan. In fact, the Ikhwan challenge to Ibn Saud was more political than religious.

The three leaders of the Ikhwan revolt of 1929, although publicly critical of Ibn Saud for his betrayal of Wahhabi principles, were in fact dissatisfied at the lack of power granted to them. The most notorious, Faisal al-Duwish<sup>a</sup> was clearly out to gain political power for himself. As a descendant of a noble tribe he also had equal claim to political authority and was resentful of its denial to him. For all his condemnation of Ibn Saud's close relations with the disbelieving British, al-Duwish<sup>a</sup> approached the British Agent in Kuwait, Harold Dickson for support to establish his own political entity. Later while on the run from Ibn Saud, al-Duwish<sup>a</sup> asked Dickson to take his family under his protection. And ultimately, al-Duwish<sup>a</sup> the 'fanatical Ikhwan' chose to surrender himself to the British rather than to Ibn Saud.

It is true that raised in cosmopolitan Kuwait, Ibn Saud was far better able to appreciate cultural and religious diversity of Hijaz than many of the Ikhwan and religious ulema that came from Najd. Yet it was nevertheless surprising to many at the time just how shrewdly Ibn Saud handled the situation in Hijaz. Aware of the potential threat from the Ikhwan Ibn Saud had always been careful not to provide them with positions of power. Thus in the Hijaz he was careful to minimise the involvement, despite their key role in conquering the territory, and he appointed his son Faisal as amir to ensure smooth relations with the population.

Ibn Saud also found in Hijaz a pre-existing bureaucracy as well as a set of more complex socio-political interactions than in central Arabia. There were merchants' guilds, an organised government structure and Hijazi society was already familiar with the motorcar, telegraph and telephone. Contrary to common perception Ibn Saud did not introduce these modern inventions, they



were already present in Hijaz, but he did ensure that such technology was harnessed and used elsewhere in the kingdom.

Ibn Saud also strengthened his relations with local businesses and Hijaz became a source of capital for the newly established Saudi government. Merchant families were approached for loans and in return were able to gain exclusive agencies and contracts.<sup>8</sup> In fact after the conquest of Hijaz Ibn Saud was to become increasingly reliant on the settled urban and business communities to provide support for the Kingdom. A process which continues today.

This work has also shown the slow pace of development in Saudi-American relations. Despite his attempts to engage Washington's attention it was not until February 1943, a full ten years after the opening of American oil operations, that the United States Government took active interest in Saudi Arabia. This was the result of intense personal lobbying by senior oil company executives at the highest levels of government, including President Roosevelt and not the result of the shrewd diplomacy of Ibn Saud.<sup>9</sup> However, this early involvement of the White House in Saudi affairs provided Ibn Saud with an advantage in his relations with America over Britain. The British Prime Minister had seldom taken an active interest in his country and it wasn't until Roosevelt met Ibn Saud in 1945 that Churchill made the effort to establish rapport with the King.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Many of his early benefactors were wealthy merchant families of non-tribal origin who had long established commercial links such as the families of Alireza and al-Qusaibi. This would later expand to include the Kamel, Ka'ki, Jameel, Bin Mahfouz, and Al-Zamil families among others.

<sup>9</sup> Barry Rubin, 'America as Junior Partner: Anglo-American Relations in the Middle East, 1919-1939' in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, ed. Uriel Dann, New York: Holmes&Meier, 1988, pp.238- 251. Also Miller, *Search for Security*, p.xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Prior to 1939 not even senior officials at Whitehall had much information about Ibn Saud despite the historic relationship Britain had with him, See Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, p. 332.

Nevertheless, officials in the State Department and the oil company lacked confidence when dealing with Arab rulers. Their lack of experience meant that they could not always read 'between the lines' and were susceptible to over-react to Ibn Saud carefully contrived statements. Any dissatisfaction with American policy registered by the King was assumed to be a general dislike of things American. The oil company worried that they would lose their concession and millions of dollars it already invested. Their concern was translated to fear in government circles making it imperative to improve Saudi-American relations—even if that was at the expense of Anglo-American relations.

Although American officials respected Britain's experience in the Middle East, they were deeply suspicious of her possible colonial intentions.<sup>11</sup> Disagreement with Britain over the nature and scope of assistance to Ibn Saud was to plague Anglo-American relations throughout the war.<sup>12</sup> Ibn Saud was able to play off these tensions to his advantage and was able to convince Washington that Britain was starving him of vital resources and promulgated the fear that British policy would bring ruin to the Saudi economy leading to the destabilisation of his regime.<sup>13</sup>

The period 1944-1945 saw the greatest tension between the United States and Britain over Saudi Arabia. Rivalry extended to the point where Churchill was competing with President Roosevelt to out do generosity to Ibn Saud.<sup>14</sup> This subsequently led to a presidential order that gave Saudi Arabia

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<sup>11</sup> Kuniholm, p.243 and Rubin *Secrets of State* p.37

<sup>12</sup> Kolko, Gabriel. *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, pp.50-51. Mikesell, Raymond, 'Oil and Foreign Policy' in *Encyclopedia of U.S. Foreign Relations*, B. Jentleson and T. Patterson ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.303-308

<sup>13</sup> Miller, *Search for Security*, p.125.

<sup>14</sup> When he learned that Roosevelt had given him a wheelchair as a gift Churchill tried to out do this by presenting the King with a Rolls Royce motor car. Howarth p. 108. Also Interview Ambassador Hermann Eilts, London, May 25 2000.



exclusive rights to receive coveted Lend Lease aid, even after the end of hostilities with Japan. Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world to be granted such an exception despite never having fired a shot in support of the Allies.<sup>15</sup> The United States gained the advantage and by 1946 had supplanted Britain as the main guarantor of political and financial stability of Saudi Arabia and the Al-Saud.<sup>16</sup> Britain suspended her subsidy altogether bringing to a close its pre-eminent position in Saudi Arabian affairs. American Cold War interests began to dominate relations with the founding father of Saudi Arabia.

The notion of Ibn Saud as the benevolent father was typically represented by Philby when he noted that Ibn Saud was :

so conscious of his personal responsibility for the proper guidance of his people that he has never been able to delegate authority, even in the smallest matters. The arrival of a guest, the breakdown of a motor car, a minor illness in the family, and other apparently trivial incidents claim his personal attention side by side with State problems of the highest importance.<sup>17</sup>

The sons of Abdul Aziz continue to draw on the symbolism of their founding father to inculcate a sense of national solidarity. They seek to enforce loyalty to the faith and the ruling family as crucial elements in the identity of Saudi Arabians. When the current ruler, King Fahd, attained power he referred to this link by noting that the principle aims of his father in creating the Kingdom were to establish a state based on "monotheism and the Islamic Sharia and to revive the ancestral way [the rule of the Al-Saud]".<sup>18</sup> Crown Prince Abdullah also stated unequivocally that King Abdul Aziz was "a man

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<sup>15</sup> Acting Secretary of State (Acheson) to Eddy, September 11, 1945, *FRUS* 1945:VIII, p. 952

<sup>16</sup> Orde, *The Eclipse of Great Britain: The United States and British Imperial Decline*, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, pp.224-225.

<sup>18</sup> Speech by King Fahd given on 3 Shawwal 1402, cited in Mohyiuddin Al-Qabesi, ed., *The Holy Quran and the Sword: Selected Addresses, Speeches and Interviews by King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud*, Riyadh: Saudi Desert House Publishing, 1998, p.32.

who stands as a symbol of the nation, a nation which in turn is the ideal embodiment of such a symbol. This is our reality. This is, after God our unifying leader".<sup>19</sup> Alongside the portraits of King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah that hang in government buildings, schools, universities and thousands of private sector offices and numerous public places, is one of Abdul Aziz, the noble father of the nation.<sup>20</sup>

Although new economic realities and challenges to the socio-economic fabric of Saudi society are forcing change to take place, the sheer size of the Al-Saud, numbering some 7000 members, means that the ability of the family to affect change remains significant. Their network of inter-relationships with business and tribal families is complex and diverse and very much entrenched. They continue to court western powers for the same reasons as their founding father; the desire to maximise economic and security interests, and ensure the longevity of the house of Al-Saud. Abdul Aziz has indeed provided an immense inheritance to his sons and whatever their future, he has left his indelible legacy on the politics, people and history of the Arabian Peninsula.

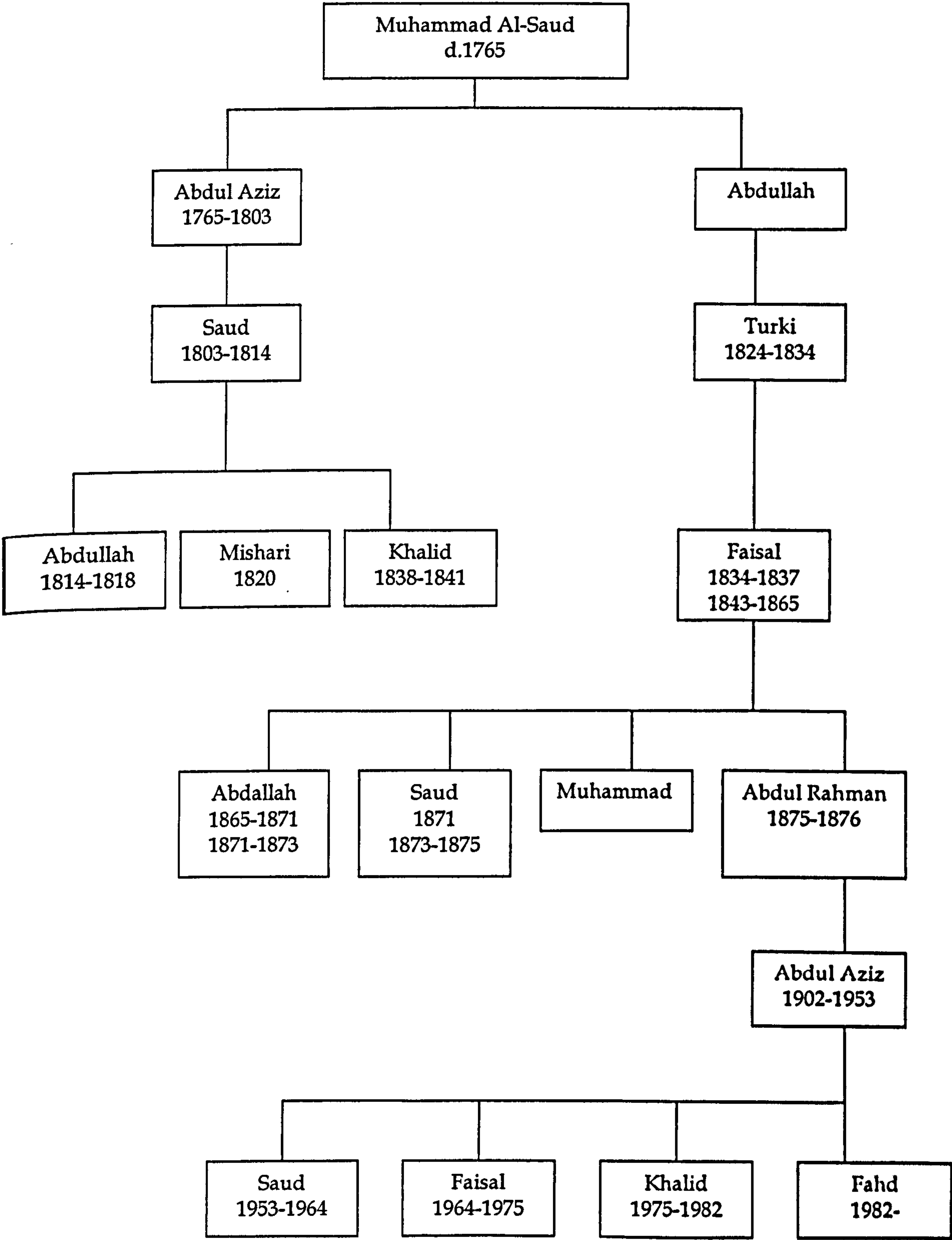
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<sup>19</sup> Message of Crown Prince Abdullah Al-Saud, on the Occasion of the National Day of Saudi Arabia, September 23, 1998, cited in *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Special Report 1998*, London: First Magazine, Winter 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Patriotic fervour reached a peak in 1998-1999 when a series of festivals, conferences and cultural events were held dedicated to Abdul Aziz to mark the centenary (according to the Arabic, Hijri calendar) of the capture of Riyadh. The nation-wide celebrations were, according to a Ministry of Information statement of 22nd of January 1999 (5th of Shawwal 1419), to perform several functions: 1. Assert the bounty of Allah. "Proclaim and rehearse the bounty of your Lord." (Qur'an 93:11) 2. Honor the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz Ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud 3. Deepen national pride and loyalty to the lofty principles upon which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based 4. Affirm the aims of the State and its Islamic legitimacy 5. Reflect on the advancements achieved over the past 100 years. 6. Establish the importance of this occasion through works, and programs, and participation from government agencies and Saudi nationals.



# Appendix I Abbreviated Genealogy of Rulers of Al-Saud



Sources: Winder, *Saudi Arabia*, p.279, and Bligh *From Prince to King*, p.106. and Saudi Information Resource, Ministry of Information Bulletin, 'Kings of Saudi Arabia'.

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